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HOW LIKE A WOMAN

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BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT

AUTHOR OF "THERE IS NO DEATH," "A FATAL SILENCE,"
"THE MASTER PASSION," "THE RISEN DEAD,"
"A HARVEST OF WILD OATS," ETC.

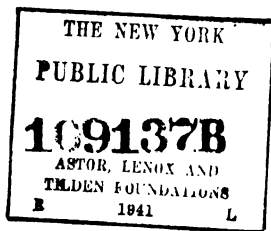
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HOW LIKE A WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

A WILFUL WARD.

THE Honorable Rachel Saltoun was the only child and heiress of Lord Edgar Saltoun, youngest son of the Duke of Craig-Morris.

Her parents had both died when she was a girl in the school-room, and she had inherited, through her mother, an estate in Surrey, and a large farm in Sussex; and through her father, a town house in Portland Place, which she thoroughly detested, and utterly refused to live in.

She had some half-dozen heirs-presumptive, who, if they did not actually thirst for her blood, would, at least, have received the news of her death with equanimity. But she was young, vigorous, and energetic, possessing a large amount of vitality and a predominant will to live and enjoy her life, which is, perhaps, the best preventive of an early demise.

She was a young lady of three-and-twenty, freed from the legal control of her guardians and trustees, Sir Henry Mordaunt, her uncle, and Mr. Robert Vyse, her late father's solicitor, and in the possession of her property; but still giving these two gentlemen a vast deal of anxiety on her account.

She was neither wild, nor what is termed in these days, fast, but she held strange theories for so young a woman;

and when she had made up her mind about a thing, nothing would turn it in the opposite direction.

Sir Henry Mordaunt, who held the old-fashioned notion, that a woman has no right to think for herself, shook his head gravely over some of his niece's vagaries, and longed for the time when he should see her married, and shift his self-constituted responsibility on to another's shoulders.

But the worst of it was, that Rachel seemed in no hurry to be married. She had plenty of suitors, or her rent-roll had, but not one of them had been allowed to approach close enough to ascertain her true feelings concerning him.

This young woman of the nineteenth century was too wide-awake to throw herself into the hands of the first handsome fellow who asked her to be his wife, or to believe all he said with regard to his loving her for herself alone. She was too well content with her present condition to be easily beguiled into changing it.

So she lived on at Catherstone, her place in Surrey, from which she had easy access to London, and left the gloomy old mansion in Portland Place in the hands of her agents, to be let or left vacant, as they saw fit.

That was another grievance of Sir Henry's. Why couldn't the girl come up to town for the season, like other people, and show herself in society? She was really handsome, and might take her choice of the best matrimonial *partis*.

But Miss Saltoun did not care for dances, and hated "afternoon teas," and generally despised all social gatherings as waste of time.

"What on earth will become of her?" thought Sir Henry Mordaunt, as he walked slowly up the approach to Catherstone one lovely day in April. He had run down from town to take luncheon with his niece, and speak to her on a subject of importance, and he had been musing over her prospects the whole way.

"It is quite unaccountable," he continued to himself. "Surely she can never intend to remain single and become one of those half-masculine creatures who will defer to no opinions but their own. But Rachel is very strange—very



strange, indeed!—and this last freak of hers is as unaccountable as the rest.”

But here his eye wandered to the masses of foliage and flowers by which he was surrounded—to the grand old red-brick mansion which lay before him, the long line of stabling and coach-houses, and the park-like grounds that sloped away to the rear—and he stamped his foot upon the gravelled drive impatiently.

“How can a girl of three-and-twenty—a mere child in business matters—direct the management of an estate like this properly—to say nothing of her Sussex property? It is ridiculous. It requires a man to do such things. Her father was a fool not to keep it out of her hands until she was married. Then she couldn’t have afforded to turn up her nose at everybody as she does now.”

At this moment there came down a side path a middle-aged lady, dressed in black. She was a short, stout little person, with an unmeaning face, but she had a good-natured, simple expression, and her eyes bore traces of having shed tears.

“Hullo! Miss Montrie,” exclaimed Sir Henry, raising his hat, “and where are you going to at luncheon time? Is not that the bell sounding now?”

“Oh, Sir Henry, I have no heart for luncheon—I have not, indeed—and I really don’t know how many more meals I may take at Catherstone. Miss Saltoun has so plainly shown me that she can dispense with my company and my advice.”

“Indeed! You surprise and distress me, Miss Montrie. Whatever is the reason? Have you quarrelled?”

“It is not my place to quarrel with Miss Saltoun, Sir Henry, but she has certainly quarrelled with me. I—I really don’t know how it will end,” said the old lady, relapsing into tears; “I did not think I was exceeding my duty, but Rachel—Miss Saltoun, I mean—took it in very bad part. She called me—*me*—impertinent, and ordered me never to presume to interfere in her private affairs again. And indeed I think I had better go, Sir Henry, for I shall never feel at home at Catherstone after what has passed between us.

"Tut, tut, tut!" replied the Baronet, gently; "it will all blow over in a day or two. Ray's bark is worse than her bite. May I ask the subject on which you differed?"

"There was no differing—at least on my side, Sir Henry, I merely carried a message to Miss Saltoun from a gentleman. I thought there was no harm in delivering it, but she resented the action as an insult."

"And the gentleman was——?"

"Lord Vivian!"

"I thought as much, Miss Montrie. Well! I think you have been very hardly used, but you must know Rachel's disposition by this time. Pride is her greatest failing, and she is very reserved about her own affairs. I have come over to-day with the express purpose of talking to her about Lord Vivian. I daresay I shall get into hot water as well as yourself. I suppose she is at home?"

"Yes, Sir Henry; but I heard her order the carriage for three o'clock. I believe she is engaged to spend the afternoon with Mrs. Ommaney."

"Oh, very well. She can drive me back again, and I shall have all the more time to talk to her. And you must cheer up, Miss Montrie, and carry a braver front. I am afraid Ray has not much sympathy with tears. She is above that sort of weakness herself."

"She has little enough to cry for," replied the companion, with a sniffle. "It ought to make her feel more for others, instead of less."

"Perhaps so; but she has the ball at her feet, and we are all more or less at her mercy. However, I don't want you to leave her just yet. She is not an easy person to get on with, I fancy; and you have considerable patience. Trust to me to set this little matter right, and believe that it will be so."

"Thank you, Sir Henry," said Miss Montrie, as he bowed, and went on his way.

The luncheon bell had just finished ringing as he reached the house, and he walked straight into the dining-room.

Rachel Saltoun rose hastily to greet him. She was a tall young woman of five feet six, with a pliant, graceful figure. Her hair was a reddish-brown, her eyes dark

gray. She had rather a long nose, and rather a wide mouth ; but good teeth, and a lovely complexion.

She was not beautiful. How many women are, when you come to think of it? The roses and lilies, lustrous eyes and Grecian noses, exist only in the imagination of second-rate novelists. We can love our friends, and take an interest in all they say and do—ay, and think them very handsome into the bargain, even though their features are not regular, nor their figures perfect.

Why cannot we therefore follow the fortunes of a fictitious heroine unless she is described to be like a painted doll from a fashion-book? One thing about the appearance of Rachel Saltoun raised her above the herd. She looked essentially a gentlewoman, and would have looked so dressed in rags.

As she came forward to welcome Sir Henry, with her proud head carried a little high upon her slender white throat, he could not help thinking how aristocratic and high-born she appeared, and what a thorough princess she would have made, had royalty been her destiny. Yet she owed nothing to her dress, which was perfectly plain, and of a simple gray mohair, braided in black.

"Well, Uncle Henry!" she exclaimed pleasantly, "and what brings you to Catherstone to-day?"

"The pleasure of seeing you, my dear," replied the Baronet, as he embraced her.

He was genuinely attached to Ray, and thought more of her than of his own children—firstly, because she gave him more anxiety; and secondly, because she was so like her dead mother, his only sister, to whom he had been deeply attached.

"More likely a scolding," laughed the girl. "You do not generally trouble me unless you have something particularly nasty to say. Never mind, uncle, we'll have our luncheon first, and fortify ourselves against the blow."

And pushing him merrily into a chair, she resumed her seat at the head of the table.

"Miss Montrie tells me you are engaged this afternoon, Ray," commenced her uncle.

"Miss Montrie?" echoed Rachel, with the faintest access of color. "Where did you see her?"

"I met her in the grounds. Is she not coming in to luncheon?"

"I don't know," said the girl, shrugging her shoulders; "she is a faddy old thing, and comes and goes as she pleases. But it is true that I am engaged for this afternoon. I am bent on a *chasse-studio* with Mrs. Ommaney."

"Going in for more pictures, Ray?"

"I think not, uncle; I don't know where I should hang them. But I like to see them all, in case I should miss a good thing."

By this time the meal was fully served, and the servants had left the room.

"Well, you must spare me a few minutes first," said Sir Henry. "What is the cause of your quarrel with Miss Montrie?"

"She told you we had quarrelled, then?" replied his niece, coloring.

"No. She denied quarrelling on her own part, but she said she had, unfortunately, offended you. How did it come about?"

"She was impertinent," said Rachel, with a haughty look.

"Impertinent! I am surprised! I thought the old lady was so very meek. What did she say?"

"She presumed to bring me a message from a person whom I have dismissed from my acquaintance, and when I told her she had taken an unpardonable liberty, she threw her arms round my neck, and tried to kiss me, and began calling me by my Christian name. I never heard of such a piece of impertinence in my life. I shall have my lady's maid trying to kiss me next. I will not stand such familiarity from any one."

"My dear, you cannot compare Miss Montrie with your maid. One is a lady, the other from a station inferior to your own."

"They are both my dependants," replied Miss Saltoun, proudly. "But I should resent such an attempt from any one, unless I had made the first advances."

"Well, I advise you to make it up with Miss Montrie. She is a good old creature, and you mustn't break her heart. Besides, remember you can't do without her."

"*Why* cannot I do without her? I am my own mistress, and I know of no clause in my father's will which compels me to keep an old woman to dog my footsteps."

"How could you live alone at your age?"

"Why could I not? Do you suppose that Miss Montrie influences any of my actions?"

"No, no! perhaps not," replied Sir Henry, testily; "but it is the *look* of the thing."

"*The look of the thing*," repeated Rachel, somewhat contemptuously. "Yes, that is how the world judges, but you know, uncle Henry, that I don't care a pin about the world."

"But you *must*, my dear."

"I don't, and I *won't*," repeated the girl, firmly. "If a thing approves itself to my conscience, I will do it, spite of a hundred worlds. If it is a consideration to Miss Montrie to live at Catherstone, and a consideration to you (as my very best friend) that she should do so, let her stay. But not to dog my footsteps, or interfere with my actions, or to give me advice which is both unheeded and uncalled for. My dear father decided that at one-and-twenty I was to become my own mistress, and my own mistress I mean to remain."

Sir Henry sighed.

"You are a wilful girl, Ray; you always have been, and I am afraid you will remain so to your life's end. But now, to touch on my own business with you. What made you reject Lord Vivian?"

"Is this another of Miss Montrie's confidences?" cried Ray.

"No, my dear; it is the errand that brought me down here. Miss Montrie did mention that she had offended by carrying a message to you from that gentleman; but he called on me yesterday himself to ask me to plead his cause with you."

"He seems to consider everybody a more efficient

orator than himself. And in that, perhaps he is right," said Rachel.

"My dear, what fault can you find with the man? He is young, good-looking, and will be an earl. He is certainly not so rich as you are, but, luckily, you can dispense with money in the man you marry."

"But not with brains, uncle."

"Lord Vivian's brains are quite as good as the average."

"The average won't do for me."

"What is it that you want, child?"

"Nothing at present, thanks, except the carriage. Will you drive back to town with me, and we can continue this delightfully-interesting subject on the way."

"It was just what I was going to propose, my dear, for I cannot leave the matter thus."

"All right, uncle. We will sift it to the bitter end. But you must give me twenty minutes to dress. A *chasse-studio* demands my best frock. Who knows if I may not meet *the* one to-day, and then, only think how pleased you will be!"

And with a mocking smile, that was altogether good-tempered, Rachel left Sir Henry to his own musings. They were rather grave.

"If she were not so thoroughly sweet about it all, one might quarrel with her," he thought; "but it is impossible to do that. She has got some absurd idea about independence, and being her own mistress in her head, and nothing will turn her resolution. She has far too determined a will, and too open a way of speaking for a woman. Men don't like it. It frightens them away. Who can she take after? Her mother was a baby compared to her. She is resolved to walk through the world alone, and when women try to do that, they invariably come to grief. They haven't the strength, nor the power, nor the head to do it."

But here Sir Henry heard the carriage drive up to the door, and walked out into the hall to await the coming of his niece.

CHAPTER II.

KATE CRANLEY.

IN a few minutes, Miss Saltoun appeared on the wide staircase, dressed in a costume of the finest fawn-colored cloth, with high sleeves, and trimmings of brown velvet. Her face was shaded by a small hat, that only showed a few tiny curls like vine tendrils clustering on her forehead. A white wing adorned one side of it, and a point lace fichu was tied round her throat; otherwise, she was guiltless of all ornament, and except for the quality of the materials, and the exquisite cut of her dress, it might have been that of a school-girl. Sir Henry Mordaunt looked at it rather disapprovingly.

"Not smart enough, uncle?" said Rachel, gayly, as she came forward, pulling on her long Suède gloves.

"I don't like smart things, Ray, but you are certainly very unlike most girls of your age. You never wear a flower or a jewel. What has become of all your mother's rings and brooches?"

"Oh, they are safe enough, locked away upstairs," replied Rachel, as she entered the carriage.

"Why do you not wear them?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, uncle, I hate jewellery. It is so terribly in the way. Rings I detest. One can do nothing with one's fingers laden with rings. And bracelets are still worse, and I can't bear to wear anything round my throat. So I am reduced to brooches, and I acknowledge they are useful. See! I am wearing one of dear mother's now—a black pearl set in diamonds. I seldom go out without it."

"But in your position, Ray, and with your large amount of jewellery, it is a positive duty you owe to society to let people see sometimes what you possess."

"Do you really think so? I am sorry, for that is a duty. I am afraid, I shall never perform. And I should only lose them, Uncle Henry. I should drop my rings in the pig-stye, when I am patting my little diddlings; and my bracelets in the manger, whilst I am feeding my horses."

"Pigsties and mangers!" exclaimed the Baronet. "When shall I ever convince you, Rachel, that a lady of your birth and education should have nothing to do with such places?"

"Never, uncle. Whilst I possess them, I shall look after them. Besides, they are my greatest pleasures. I would not give up my flower and fruit gardens and my stables and farm for all the amusements that London could afford me."

"They are all very well in their way, my dear, but it is not a lady's part to look after them personally. It requires a man to do such things."

"Well, Benwell is, of course, the real superintendent of the live stock, but I choose to superintend Benwell. Did you see my new mastiff, uncle?"

"No! Ray! I was thinking of a far more important matter than mastiffs. Will you let me resume the question I put to you in the luncheon room, and tell me why you have refused so eligible a match as Lord Vivian?"

"Willingly. I had several reasons. *Imprimis*, he is not good enough for me."

"Not good enough!"

"Certainly not. Wasn't his grandfather a bookseller, or something of that sort?"

"By no means. His great-grandfather *did* commence life, I believe, in trade, but his grandfather rose to a high position under Government; and his father was created Earl of Ilford in return for the noble manner in which he stepped forward to help the nation during the Russian war. He is a very old man now, past eighty, and Lord Vivian will be Earl of Ilford before many years are over his head."

"Dear me! How very interesting! Earl Mushroom Number Two," replied Miss Saltoun, sarcastically.

"He is a very worthy young man, and would make you

an excellent husband," said Sir Henry. "What may be your other reasons for refusing his offer?"

"One is quite sufficient," said Rachel, elevating her head. "I do not consider the blood of a bookseller's great-grandson to be good enough to mix with that of the granddaughter of the Duke of Craig Morris. I would sooner marry a commoner of good birth, any day, than one of these Brummagem aristocrats. I consider it a disgrace to the nation that they should be allowed to exist. And added to this, I dislike Lord Vivian personally, and would not marry him if he belonged to the blood Royal."

"You are uncommonly hard to please, Ray," sighed Sir Henry. "Last year you refused half-a-dozen eligible suitors."

"Who all came after my money-bags. You know that as well as I do, uncle. I am a rich woman, and these men wanted my property—not me. Do you think I can't see through them? And I prefer my property to them, and no one has a right to quarrel with my decision."

"But, my dear child, you must marry some day."

"I might answer you in the words of Rousseau to the author who averred he must live, '*Je ne vois pas la nécessité.*'"

"Oh! that is nonsense," replied Sir Henry, testily. "You can never intend to remain an old maid, and let all your money fall into the open maw of some distant cousin. You must marry; you owe it to yourself and your dead parents. And you are getting on, you know, Ray. You were three-and-twenty last birthday, and a woman begins to go down hill after five-and-twenty."

Ray looked at her gloves for a few moments thoughtfully, then said,—

"Well, there's one comfort, I'm not a beauty, and so am the less likely to deteriorate. But as to the marriage question, uncle, I cannot be coerced. I think it is very unlikely that I shall ever marry. I have no wish to do so. I am perfectly happy as I am, and I have certainly never seen the man yet for whom I would give up my liberty."

"You are too proud, Rachel; that's what is the matter,

my dear. You think no living man good enough for you."

"Oh, yes, I do! or, I mean I should, if I could find him; but he has not come across my path yet. And I will take my father's blood virgin to the grave sooner than contaminate it."

"What do you call contamination? Birth in a lower sphere of society than your own?"

"No, uncle. Fusing my life with one that cannot bear the light of day, that has been a career of dissipation and wrong-doing."

"Oh, Ray, Ray! You are too particular. You will never marry at this rate. Men are not like women, you know, my dear."

"I am quite aware of it, uncle. I was twenty-three—as you remarked just now—last birthday, but my husband (if ever I have a husband) must be very much above the ordinary run of men in every respect."

"You want a god from Olympus, my dear, and they don't come down to take wives from the daughters of men nowadays."

"Let them stay away, then," cried Rachel, irreverently, "for I don't want them. I am quite contented alone. Who could be situated more fortunately? My own mistress, with everything I can require about me, and no one to control my actions. Please don't pity me, uncle; I consider myself one of the luckiest girls in the world."

"If you would only come and stay in Ladgrove Square during the season," argued Sir Henry, "your aunt would be delighted to take you about with Rosie and Lena, and then you might have some chance of seeing others, and being seen yourself."

"Of being properly put up to sale, you mean," laughed Rachel. "No, dear uncle, I know your intentions are kindly, but I shouldn't enjoy myself. Rosa and Lena are dear girls, and Aunt Mary is always good to me, but we haven't the same tastes. You know that I am fond of study and quiet, and a free country life, and hate dancing and chatter, and scandal; so that we should be all at loggerheads. If I could stand a London life, I should take up

residence in the family mausoleum in Portland Place. But I love Catherstone better, so leave me there in peace."

"And yet you are going to Mrs. Ommaney's this afternoon?"

"Oh, yes; I like to visit my friends now and then; besides, I am going to see pictures. Do you remember the great stir that was made last year by an Academy picture called 'The Birth of Spring?' It was a marvellous creation, and by quite an unknown artist, named Salter. It is to his studio that Mrs. Ommaney is going to take me this afternoon. She could not give me a greater treat, for there is nothing I care for so much as painting. The worst part of it is, that it makes me so terribly disgusted with my own efforts. They say Mr. Salter's picture for this year is twice as good as the last, and that he is the coming R.A. How I wish I had some companion to sympathize with my tastes. I cannot stand Miss Montrie, and her eternal acquiescence, any longer. She is like an irritating echo. I shall give her a year's salary, and let her go, and ask Mrs. Cranley to come and live with me in her stead."

"Who is Mrs. Cranley, Ray?"

"Don't you remember Kate Aubyn? She married a Mr. Cranley in the War Office, but he died last year, and left her very badly off. She is a better artist than I am, and would improve my drawing, and I know she would be only too glad to accept the position of watch-dog (as if I would let anyone watch me)."

"I am afraid it would be a thankless office, Ray. But about this Mrs. Cranley. Haven't I heard rumors of her being rather fast?"

Miss Saltoun fired up in a moment.

"Fast! That is just like the ill-nature of people in this horrid world. How could the poor girl be fast on a hundred and fifty a year? Why, she can hardly keep bread in her mouth and a dress on her back, and works like a slave at her painting to make ends meet. And yet, I suppose, if she sometimes goes to the theatre with a friend, or has a little luncheon or supper in the Strand, people are uncharitable enough to put the worst construc-

tion on her actions. But she is pretty. That is her greatest sin, and so all the scandal-mongers must pick her to pieces."

"Hush, hush! my dear Ray, you need not exert yourself so warmly in defence of your friend. I certainly *have* heard Mrs. Cranley mentioned as making herself noticeable, but I am quite ready to believe it to be untrue on your authority. But are you seriously thinking of supplanting Miss Montrie by this lady?"

"I don't think I *was* seriously thinking of it until you said she was 'fast,' but I shall certainly do it now. Mrs. Cranley evidently wants a friend, and I will be one to her."

"And poor Miss Montrie must be the sacrifice?"

"Uncle, you don't know what Miss Montrie is. If the idea of her living at Catherstone is my protection, she is no good at all. She is a perfect cipher in the house, and is as afraid of me as if she were a slave and I her driver!"

"I don't wonder at that," murmured Sir Henry.

"I can't take her anywhere with me because she is not presentable enough," continued Rachel, not heeding his interpolation; "and whenever her presence is required—when I have friends to dinner, for example—she is generally *hors de combat* with neuralgia or toothache. She is no companion to me, and is only fit to look after girls in the schoolroom. I hope you will not be annoyed about it, but she really must go. 'I can't stand her any longer,' as the Bohee Brothers sing."

"Well, my dear Ray, if you have made up your mind about it, it will not be of much use my feeling annoyed. But I hope you will be careful in choosing her successor."

"I *have* been careful. I knew Kate Cranley before her marriage. She is only two years older than I am, and she is a person whom I can take about with me (if necessary), and who can help me to amuse my guests. I see no reason why Mrs. Cranley and I should not end our days together at Catherstone."

"Unless Mrs. Cranley proves wiser than yourself," said her uncle, slyly, "and turns her thoughts again to marriage."

"Oh, there's no fear of that," replied Ray, confidently; "she's had more than enough of marriage already, poor girl. I know she was very unhappy with Mr. Cranley, and, poor as he left her, it was a relief when he died."

"Well, there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it," said Sir Henry, in conclusion, "and if the lady doesn't suit you, you can easily get another."

"Or live by myself," replied Miss Saltoun, as the carriage stopped before Mrs. Ommaney's house in Bayswater.

"Ah! Ray, Ray, you mustn't try *that*," exclaimed the Baronet, as she jumped lightly to the ground.

"Well, I'm not going to live under *espionage* till I'm eighty, Uncle Henry. If you think so, you are very much mistaken," cried Rachel, gayly, and then, having directed her coachman to take Sir Henry wherever he wished to go, and to return for her at once to Mrs. Ommaney's, she waved her hand smilingly to the Baronet, and disappeared behind the door of her friend's house.

When she reached the drawing-room she found quite a party assembled there, ready to start for the studio, and amongst them the lady she had been speaking of—Mrs. Cranley.

Both she and Mrs. Ommaney came forward to welcome Miss Saltoun, and Rachel was cordial in her turn, though not effusive.

"Gush" was altogether out of this young woman's *métier*. She did not believe in two women kissing and squeezing one another; indeed, to tell the truth, she did not much believe in the friendship of her own sex at all.

She could enjoy herself in their company, and admire their talents, or beauty, or wit, but she never reposed any confidence in them, and she never listened to any scandal from them.

Ladies of much more advanced age than herself were a little afraid of Miss Saltoun, and hushed their censure of the absent in her presence. They called her cold, and proud, and reserved, and so, to a certain extent, she was; but they never had an opportunity to sound the depths of her nature, which was thoroughly opposed to everything

that was mean, uncharitable, or untrue. They always met her cordially, and were anxious to be introduced, for she was known to be wealthy and able to confer all manner of benefits upon her acquaintances.

Many of them had an eye to her as a possible wife for their sons, or their brothers, but, except upon the very surface, Rachel was quite unapproachable in society.

Even to Mrs. Cranley, who had been a school-fellow of hers in the *Pensionnat* at Brussels, where she had been placed during the first years after her parents' death, she only extended her hand with a kindly smile, and a hope that she was well.

This Mrs. Cranley was a very attractive-looking woman; so much so, indeed, that her plain black dress and little beaded bonnet, both made by her own hands, were quite lost sight of in the handsome face above them.

She was a brunette, with sparkling dark eyes and dark hair, and a brilliant complexion, not entirely unaided by the toilet. Her figure was perfect, and she looked what she was—a thorough lady.

It was only men, perhaps—so much keener in such things than women—who would have noted the meretricious flash of her eyes, and the artificiality of her smile. She was always pleasant and soft-spoken in society, keeping her claws (if she had any) well shielded by her velvet paws, and ready to purr sympathetically, whether she sympathized or not.

She was the most dangerous order of women in the world. An open insult is easier to combat than a smiling falsehood.

Mrs. Ommaney came forward with an excess of gratitude for the favor of Rachel's presence. She was a great lion-hunter and general toad-eater, and she knew that a rich and single young woman was an attraction to her assemblies.

"So good of you to join us, dear Miss Saltoun," she commenced; "Mr. Salter will be proud and happy. I hardly dared to promise him you would be of the party."

"There is not much goodness in the matter, Mrs. Ommaney," returned Rachel; "I am as devoted to art, per-

haps, as anyone here, and am quite longing to see the new picture."

"My dear! they say it is wonderful, and puts his first efforts altogether in the shade. It is called 'The Awakening of the Soul.' Such a mysterious subject, and treated, I hear, like a master. I expect we shall meet quite a representative assembly at his studio this afternoon."

"I am anticipating the pleasure beyond anything," said Rachel; "I want to see all the contents of his studio. I missed securing his 'Birth of the Spring,' last season, by a few hours only. I was so disappointed. It had impressed me greatly."

"Ah, my dear Miss Saltoun, you possess the enviable ability to purchase what you may admire for your own gratification."

"And that of my friends, I hope," said Rachel, smiling. "But Catherstone is my hobby, Mrs. Ommaney. When I am away from it I feel like a mother separated from her child, and am always thinking what I can take home to adorn it more——"

"It can scarcely be said to need adornment," remarked Mrs. Cranley.

"You admire the old place, I know," said Rachel, kindly. "You must come and see it again, Mrs. Cranley."

"There are a dozen ladies and gentlemen waiting to be presented to you, Miss Saltoun, if I may make so bold," whispered her hostess.

"Oh, certainly," replied Rachel with a slight droop of her mouth, as several smirking individuals were brought up, one after another, and gave vent to some meaningless phrases about the pleasure of making her acquaintance.

But when Miss Saltoun had bowed gravely in answer to each salutation, and they had retreated again, they did not feel as if they had gained much by the introduction and told each other, as soon as her back was turned, that her money must be the best thing about her, for she was not at all pretty, and very "stand-offish," and dressed like anybody else.

Meanwhile the carriages were announced, and the party set off, Rachel having invited Mrs. Cranley to accompany her to the studio.

CHAPTER III.

THE UNKNOWN ARTIST.

GEOFFREY SALTER'S studio was situated in a remote part of Haverstock Hill, where so many artists used to congregate to pursue their profession. There are newer and more fashionable studios erected now, in South Kensington, and its purlieus; and Mr. Salter's friends had often urged him to migrate further West, where he could have better opportunities of mixing in society, and secure the patronage of big people to inspect his work. But he had obstinately refused to move.

He had a sensitive and refined soul, that shrank from the crowded *salons* and the glare of gaslight—still more from the Bohemian resorts, whose highest pleasures were the fumes of tobacco, the jingle of glasses, and the singing of comic songs.

He could not understand how men could conceive delicate and fanciful ideas, and keep steady hands and clear brains to execute them with, under such debasing conditions. He would have liked himself to live down in the country, "far from the madding crowd," and carry out his dreams in solitude.

But that was incompatible with doing justice to the art by which he lived, and by which he hoped to climb the ladder of fame. If he had other reasons for living on Haverstock Hill; if something more than the dislike of dissipation, and the hope of advancement detained him in that out-of-the-way studio, and the tiny cottage behind it, he kept them to himself, and lived his isolated life without comment or explanation. And Geoffrey Salter had certainly earned the right to please himself.

Of his genius there was no doubt. He had been working for many years, unknown to any one but the picture dealers

and a large *clientèle* in America, who had purchased his sketches as fast as he could produce them.

But his Academy picture of the year before had dawned upon the world like a new revelation, and made his name at once. It had been the attraction to Burlington House; crowds had stood before it daily, and it had been eventually purchased by a noble art connoisseur for a large sum.

Still Mr. Salter did not lose his head, but continued to occupy the Haverstock Hill studio, and to work hard in order to outdo himself, and he had done so. He felt he had done so that afternoon as he arranged the folds of dark velvet about the easel, on which rested "The Awakening of the Soul," and awaited the arrival of his guests.

The studio was a large and very ordinary-looking room, but he had made it beautiful. On the walls were hung various casts of feet and hands, and fruit and flowers, with numerous sketches for enlargement, and designs for paintings. At one end stood the raised dais for his models, on which the lay figure was leaning helplessly, but screened from view, on the present occasion, by an enormous palm which towered to the skylight.

Before it, placed upon a Persian carpet, were two luxurious lounges covered in Damascus tapestry of rich, soft hues. Every color in the studio, indeed, was kept in subservience to the tints upon the canvas and the dull gilding upon the frames. It was easy to see at a glance what the artist loved best—flowers. They were everywhere, whilst ferns and palms, and other foreign plants formed their background, and made the *atelier* look more like a greenhouse than a workshop.

Amongst them stood Mr. Salter, with his hand upon his favorite wolf-hound's head. At first sight, perhaps, the romantically-inclined might have been disappointed in his appearance. He had exceptional beauty, but he did not choose to clothe it, as he did his studio. Had he posed, like divers of his brethren, in a velvet coat and turned-down collar, and let his dark hair grow long, he would have looked like a picture by Velasquez.

But Geoffrey Salter had no affectation or femininity about him. He would have spent any amount on the adornment of his art, but nothing more than was necessary on himself. His face was extremely interesting, and had a look of sadness which made it more so; but he was dressed in a plain modern suit, and had not even a flower in his buttonhole. His dark hair was cut quite short, and brushed back at the side without any parting at the middle, where it fell in a natural wavy curl over his forehead. He had a habit of shaking back this curl, or throwing it back with his hand when he was nervous, that was characteristic of him.

For Mr. Salter was both nervous and shy. He possessed a highly-strung temperament, and a sensitive organization to which open praise (so delightful to most men) became a positive pain. He generally colored deeply when addressed or forced into the foreground, but yet could converse freely enough with a friend or a fellow artist. His large, deep blue eyes—so deep blue as almost to look black—had a peculiar far-off look in them, as though he were only half-conscious of what was going on around him; and his mouth, unshaded by beard or mustache, combined determination of character with tenderness of disposition in a remarkable degree.

By the herd, perhaps, Geoffrey Salter would have been passed over as an ordinary-looking young man; but no one who examined his features could fail to perceive their beauty. His was a face that grew upon you—that, when you were once familiar with, you would find it impossible to match in your imagination.

As he stood thus, there was a sound as of many wheels, and a *cortège* of carriages and cabs drew up before the studio door. The hour had arrived at which he had announced it would be open, and his friends showed their anxiety by their punctuality.

In another minute the room was crowded by an eager party, all shaking hands with the artist, and introducing their companions, and the lion of the day, the great Academy picture, was surrounded by a mass of worshippers, whilst Mr. Salter stood modestly apart, with one hand rest-

ing on the easel which supported his brain child—half fearful, perhaps, like an anxious mother, lest his friends should prove his foes, and injure it by the excess of their admiration.

The picture was a remarkable one. It represented the nude figure of a girl—life size—stretched upon a bed of moss, and just awakening from sleep. She lay in a forest, beneath the shadow of a tree, and everything about her betokened the Dawn. The first glimpse of the sun appeared in the sky, the mists of night were rolling away before it in the distance. So delicately was the subject handled, that one might have almost fancied one saw the quivering of the leaves, and the unfolding of the woodland blossoms with the little breeze that stirred them.

The birds had awakened, and were singing in the boughs, a butterfly hovered over the flowering grass, on which the dewdrop still trembled. And the human creature seemed to respond to the revelations of nature. She was represented in a half sitting position, leaning on her elbow, with her face upturned to the rising sun. But it was the expression of her face that made the wonder of the picture. It was unmistakable. Whilst her frame seemed to tremble beneath the marvel of a great discovery her eyes widely dilated, and her lips partially open, seemed to speak aloud, and say, "I believe!"

Mrs. Ommaney's party, worldly enough in themselves, stood before it, awestruck. They could not misunderstand the message. It spoke even to them.

"How beautiful!" at last said Mrs. Ommaney, beneath her breath. "Oh, Mr. Salter! you have indeed given us a treat. I never saw anything like this in my life before."

Mr. Salter colored in his boyish way, and replied simply:

"I am glad you like it."

His voice was singularly low and sweet, and caught Miss Saltoun's attention for the first time, and she looked up hastily from the picture to the artist. How aristocratic and refined, she thought he looked, as he stood there—as far above the feathers and flowers and flounces of Mrs. Ommaney's party, as he was above the velveteen clothes

and tobacco-scented professionals who lounged at the back of the studio. She would never have guessed he was an artist. He looked like any ordinary gentleman. But how sad he seemed. What could be the reason?

As she mused thus, Geoffrey Salter raised his eyes, and looked straight into hers, with the calm, unconscious gaze of a child, and then turned them in an opposite direction, without confusion or conceit. He did not know she was an heiress, or an aristocrat; and if he had, it would have made no difference to him. He only recognized her as one of Mrs. Ommaney's guests, and at first sight she appeared rather a plain girl to him, though graceful in demeanor, and elegantly dressed.

Rachel re-directed her attention to the picture, but she could not forget the look of melancholy, as if he had experienced some crushing sorrow, in Mr. Salter's eyes, and alluded to it on several occasions afterwards.

The appearance of an old housekeeper with a large lackered brass tray, bearing coffee cups and saucers, created a diversion in another direction.

"Now, Mrs. Ommaney," suggested the artist, in his subdued voice, "if you have seen enough of my little maiden, will you and the ladies of your party honor me by taking tea or coffee? Bannister and Marshall, you lazy fellows!" he continued, addressing some of the men of the party, "come here, and hand round the fruit and cake. You will forgive all the discrepancies of a bachelor establishment, I hope, ladies, but my good old friend here, Mrs. Keen, has done her best for you."

"Oh, Mr. Salter! how can you talk of such things as tea and cake in the same breath as that lovely picture?" cried Mrs. Ommaney. "I could sit and look at it all day, till I starved to death."

At this absurd assertion, Mr. Salter proved that he could laugh, and very mirthfully.

Rachel glanced up again, and caught him in the act, and was still more convinced that it must have been something very out of the way that had caused so unnatural an expression as that of melancholy to habitually pervade his countenance.

He met her eye also, and continued to smile broadly, although the blood mounted to his forehead whilst he did so. But here some other visitors claimed his attention, and he was obliged to turn away.

"My dear Miss Saltoun," whispered Mrs. Ommaney, with her mouth full of sally-lun, "you really should get Mr. Salter to decorate the pannels of your octagon room. Sir John Lamwell says he has done some frescoes for the walls of the Duke of Cressy's dining-room at Thorley Castle that are positively lovely. And you should catch him at once, you know. His prices will go up every day."

"For an artist like that, to paint the panels of a room!" exclaimed Miss Saltoun, as she glanced at the "Awakening." "Oh, it would be sacrilege! But I wonder if he gives lessons? How I should love to study under him! I care for nothing but oils."

"You can but ask him, my dear. He can only take it as a compliment, from a person in *your* position."

"I couldn't do it," said Rachel. "I should be afraid of offending him."

"Oh, nonsense! It's a matter of business, after all. *I'll* pave the way for you," replied Mrs. Ommaney, and, after a few seconds, she pursued Mr. Salter to the other end of the studio.

"Mr. Salter," she commenced, "did you notice Miss Saltoun, the young lady I presented to you?"

"The tall young lady in cream and brown? Certainly I did, Mrs. Ommaney."

"Well, she's rather an important personage in her way. She's the great heiress, Miss Rachel Saltoun, granddaughter of the Duke of Craig-Morris, and she's enormously wealthy—got something like fifteen thousand a year. I believe, and well able to indulge her whims—and she's mad about painting!"

"Indeed!"

"Oh, yes! That is why I brought her here to see you to-day. Do you know she would have been the owner of 'The Birth of Spring,' last year if its purchaser had not struck his bargain a few hours before her offer."

"Really! That is very flattering to me."

"I knew you would say so, and I want you to make friends with her. She might be of infinite use to you. She has a lovely place called Catherstone, close to Roehampton; and she is an artist also in her way. She paints very well, and is bent upon having some lessons from you. Cannot you oblige her?"

Geoffrey Salter's face suddenly clouded over.

"I am sorry, but I never give lessons. It is impossible! I have no time."

"Couldn't you make an exception in Miss Saltoun's favor? She is so very rich, you know."

He smiled again.

"I am afraid even that will not tempt me. Indeed, Mrs. Ommaney, I regret to appear disobliging, but if I took one pupil, I should be compelled to accept others, and it would interfere with my work."

"Well, you must come and tell her so yourself. She is charming. You will be delighted with her," replied Mrs. Ommaney, as she dragged him, very red in the face, up to Rachel's side. "My dear Miss Saltoun, here is Mr. Salter come to tell you why he cannot have you for a pupil. But you must coax him into changing his mind."

But this was not at all in Rachel's line, and she looked almost as nervous as the young artist as he dropped into a place by her side.

"Mrs. Ommaney tells me," he began, "that you are looking out for a painting master, and if so, I can recommend you to a thorough artist, in whom you can place the utmost confidence, and who would be delighted to direct your studies."

"It isn't that, replied Rachel; "I could find any number of masters, but—but—I may as well say it at once—I admire your work greatly, and felt a strong desire to study under you. But I never thought you would consent to it. I am only a beginner, and, should doubtless give more trouble than I am worth."

"It is not that," he answered, gently; "we must all be beginners at one time; but I really have no leisure to devote to pupils. When I am not painting I have many other things to do."

"What sort of things?" asked Rachel, brusquely.

Mr. Salter hesitated a moment, and then said, as if with an effort,—

"Domestic duties. My people expect to see me sometimes; so do my friends."

"Do your people live in London, then?"

"Yes," he answered, briefly.

"I live at Catherstone, in Surrey," continued Rachel; "it is a lovely old place, and there is one part of my park of which the glade in your picture powerfully reminds me. I could almost believe you had taken it from Catherstone. Do you love the country, Mr. Salter?"

"Very much," he answered, fervently.

"I think you would admire Catherstone. The house has been partially rebuilt, but the trees around it are many centuries old. It came to me through my mother. I was born there. I seem to have had no other home, so you may imagine how dear it is to me. If you should ever be near Roehampton, I hope you will come and see Catherstone."

"Thank you, Miss Saltoun," he replied rather stiffly, "but I very seldom leave London."

Then she tried him on another tack.

"I hear," she said, "that you have designed some exquisite frescoes for Lord Cressy's rooms at Thorley Castle. What were the subjects?"

"I will show you the designs if they have any interest for you," replied Mr. Salter, as he rose and took sundry rolls of oiled paper from a drawer; "you will see that they represent the loves of Cupid and Psyche."

And placing the outlines on a little table before her, Geoffrey Salter left Miss Saltoun to look over them by herself.

The heiress was piqued. She had no vulgar pride in her riches, but she had gone there with the idea of becoming a patroness to this rising genius, and the genius seemed as though he could do very well without her. She had given him a strong hint that she would like to see him at Catherstone, and he had thrown cold water on the idea. She had intended to engage him to decorate the

panels in her octagon room, and he had evidently no desire for the order.

"*Who* is this Mr. Salter?" she asked of Mrs. Ommaney as they were going homewards. "He seems a very independent sort of person. Is he a gentleman?"

"Well, my dear Miss Saltoun, I should have thought you might have seen that for yourself!" exclaimed her hostess, taking up arms for the man she had introduced her to.

"At any rate," remarked Mrs. Cranley, curtly, "he is a *prig*!"

CHAPTER IV.

AN AGREEMENT.

As they drove along Rachel invited Kate Cranley to return and dine with her at Catherstone; so, having deposited Mrs. Ommaney at her own door—a penalty which Miss Saltoun usually had to pay for the pleasure of her company—the two young women proceeded towards Roehampton together. Naturally their conversation turned on the event of the afternoon.

"I agree with you, Mrs. Cranley," said Rachel, suddenly. "Mr. Salter's extreme modesty cannot be natural; it is put on for the occasion. He must be, as you say, a prig!"

"His every action shows it," replied her companion.

"The other day he was nobody; now a stroke of good luck has brought him into prominence, and it has turned his head. Some people show it by vulgar boldness; Mr. Salter adopts the other extreme. He carries a 'touch-me-not' air about him that is even more provoking, because there is nothing one can possibly snub."

"I am disappointed in him," said Miss Saltoun, with a little sigh. "I expected more from the author of such beautiful conceptions. No one can deny his genius, Mrs. Cranley. Some of the sketches round his walls were marvellous. Such wonderful breadth, combined with so much delicacy. I longed to ask the price of them; but I did not dare. There is something about Mr. Salter so disassociated with money. I could not talk to him as if his grand talents were a matter of barter and exchange."

"Oh! my dear Miss Saltoun, you are far too modest. He would be only too delighted to secure you for a patron. And look at the society you might introduce him to. Your acquaintance might be the making of him."

"That is what I thought; and I almost asked him to come to Catherstone, but he did not take the hint."

Then, as if struck by a sudden thought, she added,—

"But let us talk of yourself, Mrs. Cranley. How are you getting on with your art?"

"Oh! don't dignify it by so grand a name," replied Kate Cranley. "Art cannot live with such poverty as mine; it has deserted me long ago. My talents must be prostituted to my need. Sometimes I think that, under happier circumstances, I might have been an artist; but as it is I am nothing but a slave."

"What are you doing now, then?"

"Chiefly painting satin for fans, reticules, chair-backs—for anything the shops require, in fact; and when they fail me I do Christmas cards and door-panels, and get rid of them amongst my friends, which is pleasanter for me than for them. But it is monotonous work, and I get very sick of it sometimes."

"Poor girl, I am sure you must," said Rachel sympathetically. "And do you never think of trying any other occupation?"

"What could I do, Miss Saltoun? Sometimes I have thought of going on the stage!"

"Oh, no, don't do that! Don't degrade yourself by doing that!" exclaimed Rachel, with a look of horror. "You are a gentlewoman, Mrs. Cranley. You could never endure the demoralizing tendencies of such a position."

"Are they demoralizing?" said Mrs. Cranley. "I question if poverty does not hold out far worse temptations to a woman. It is so hard to live alone, with scarcely any variety."

"It must be. But could you not get a situation in some nice family?"

"As companion to some horrible old woman!" cried Kate Cranley, interrupting her. "Oh, no, I could not stand the life for a day. It would kill me. I can't bear old people, they are so terribly cranky."

Miss Saltoun laughed.

"But a woman need not be horribly old, because she

requires a companion. I have one, for example. My uncle, Sir Henry Mordaunt (who is my guardian and trustee) does not consider it proper that I should live without one, though I think it very absurd. However, to please him, a companion—a watch-dog, I call her—forms part of my household, and her appointment is absolutely a sinecure. She lives with me simply for the look of the thing.”

“Oh, that must be very different, of course,” replied Mrs. Cranley. “To live in a lovely place like Catherstone, and only to have to please you, Miss Saltoun. But I am not likely to get a chance like that.”

“I don’t see why you shouldn’t, for I am just about to change my companion, Miss Montrie, and if you would like to accept the vacant place, Mrs. Cranley, it is open to you.”

Kate Cranley’s dark eyes beamed with gratification. A residence at Catherstone, and amidst the high society which she knew Miss Saltoun kept, opened out all sorts of possibilities to her, and visions of an aristocratic alliance floated immediately before her eyes.

“Oh, Miss Saltoun !” she exclaimed, with clasped hands, “do you really mean it? I shall feel as if I had entered Paradise !”

“I never say what I don’t mean,” replied Rachel, drawing a little backward, for she always dreaded anything like enthusiasm in her own sex. “But it is purely a matter of business, and we must regard it as such. Let me tell you first what I require. Miss Montrie is a good old soul, but she is too old for me. She has her own rooms, of course, and I do not expect her to join me, except at meals, without an invitation ; but she is never forthcoming when necessary. It is most awkward for a young woman of my age to assemble a dinner-party and then find herself alone at the head of the table, and no one to look after her guests at the other end. Miss Montrie has played me that trick so often by falling sick, or something of the sort, at the last moment, that I am tired of it, and so she must go. I want someone younger and brisker, and who will help me to fill Catherstone with

guests. I should like to make the dear old place a central meeting-ground for clever men and women; to keep open house on a certain day each week, and collect the lights of London round me; to make it worth their while to come, and delight me with their wit and brilliancy and talent. Now, you and I, I think, between us, could do all this."

"Oh, Miss Saltoun, I should be so proud, so happy, to help you in such a task."

"I am sorry for poor Miss Montrie," said Rachel, musingly, "because she will be grieved at the change; but she is just no good at all. She is afraid of me and of my guests, and a lay figure is just as brilliant a conversationalist. But you can talk well, Mrs. Cranley, and you dress well, and I want someone to do both."

"According to my poor means," said Kate Cranley, glancing at her attire. "This frock just cost thirty shillings, and I made it myself. But I can cut out and fit well, and my figure is pretty good; so I generally pass muster."

"Your figure is very perfect," replied Rachel, calmly, "and you will have the wherewithal to clothe it properly. As we are talking over the matter, I may as well mention that I give Miss Montrie two hundred a year. Will that satisfy you?"

"It is more than my present income, Miss Saltoun. How I pity poor Miss Montrie for losing it!"

"I don't know that Miss Montrie deserves your pity, Mrs. Cranley. She has quite brought her fate on her own head. She took an unwarrantable liberty with me, and a liberty is what I cannot forgive. I hope I never forget myself towards other people, and so I do not expect them to forget themselves towards me," said Rachel, very stately.

"Oh no, of course not," replied her companion; "and will you tell me, Miss Saltoun, just what my duties will be?"

"You will have no duties at all, Mrs. Cranley, except to bear me company when you feel disposed. You are simply to give an air of respectability to Catherstone, and to enable

me to ask a gentleman there occasionally. But if you like it (and I hope you may), I shall ask you to assist me in getting up these *salons* which I have in my mind's eye. I want them to be so brilliant, that people shall come again and again—people like the best authors and authoresses, and artists—men like Mr. Salter, for instance. I should like the London world to say, 'you never meet so many geniuses anywhere as at Catherstone.' Oh, I would rather be a genius than anything else in the world!"

"Many people would call you so, Miss Saltoun."

"Nonsense! I have not even talent. I have only the capacity to suck other people's brains—to drink the draught that others have mixed for me—only that, and this terrible weight of money, which I don't know what to do with. No, no; I must not be ungrateful. I have Catherstone, and the capability to make others happy."

"You have made me very happy to-day, Miss Saltoun," said Kate Cranley. "To think of exchanging my mean little lodgings for rooms at Catherstone, seems like a fairy tale."

"It is settled then, and you will come to me?" said Rachel.

"With gratitude."

"It cannot be for a few weeks yet, you know. I must get rid of Miss Montrie first, or she might poison you," exclaimed Rachel, laughing. "So please do not mention the subject before her this evening. Here we are, back at the dear old place again," she continued, as the carriage turned in at the park gates of Catherstone. "God bless every stick and stone of it. Every time I leave it, if only for a few hours, I think I love it more."

Kate Cranley did not join in the heiress's enthusiasm. She saw all the advantages of living at Catherstone, but she was no lover of the country. She would have much preferred a *ménage* in Portland Place, and a continuous succession of theatres, concerts, and balls; but she was not so impolitic as to say so.

As they entered the lighted hall together, Miss Montrie waddled out to meet them, and began to fuss over Rachel Saltoun.

"Oh, my dear Miss Saltoun, how late you are ; it is just upon the stroke of seven. I hope you are not tired. I hope you did not drive home with both the carriage windows down ; it is very chilly in the evenings, you know, and you might catch a cold. Will you take a few drops of camphor in a wine-glass of water before your dinner ?"

"Oh ! no, no. I am all right," replied Rachel, impatiently. "Come this way, Mrs. Cranley ; you can have the use of my dressing-room. We shall be ready for dinner in ten minutes, Miss Montrie."

And the two young women ran up the stairs together like lightning. Miss Montrie looked after them with astonishment, not unmixed with envy, in her little round eyes.

"Dear, dear," she ejaculated ; "she is very short with me. I am afraid I have offended her beyond forgiveness ; and all because I presumed to assist Lord Vivian. Oh, dear ! Oh dear !"

And then she waddled into the dining-room and took her usual seat at the bottom of the table, where, in a few minutes, Miss Saltoun and Mrs. Cranley joined her.

Naturally, in a large establishment like that of Catherstone, there were cooks and men-servants to look after the equipage of the dinner-table, and the mistress knew nothing of what would be set before her until the covers were removed. Naturally, also, in such a case the best of everything was served, since the reversionary interest of the banquet found its way to the servants' hall.

To Rachel Saltoun, all this was part of the daily routine of her life, to which she had been accustomed from a child ; but to Kate Cranley it was a revelation. Of course, she had often dined at her friends' houses, but this was a family dinner, nothing was *en fête*, and yet everything was arranged as if it were, and she could hardly conceal her satisfaction to think she was to share it all.

The conversation of the dinner-table was kept up entirely by her hostess and herself, whilst Miss Montrie sat at her end, partaking of every dish offered to her, and eating it greedily, whilst her small eyes twinkled with gratification, and her loose-lipped, pleasure-loving mouth mumbled

over the food, as though she would make double of it.

Rachel threw one or two glances of disgust in her direction, but the old lady never noticed them, though Mrs. Cranley did, and ate sparingly herself in consequence.

As soon as coffee was served, moreover, she reminded Miss Saltoun of the distance she was from home, and of the necessity there was for her reaching the railway station early.

Rachel shook hands with her, with a promise that she should hear from her shortly; and rang the bell, and ordered a footman to see the lady safely into her train. But she did not offer to send her home in a carriage; and Kate Cranley felt that, however considerately, and even familiarly, she might be treated at Catherstone, there would always be the sense of "thus far shalt thou go, and no further," about Miss Saltoun.

When she had taken her departure, and the other ladies were left together in the drawing-room, Rachel turned to Miss Montrie.

"Miss Montrie, I hope you will not take what I am going to say otherwise than as I mean it; but I have been speaking about you to my uncle this afternoon, and I really think it will be better that we should part."

Miss Montrie was seated in an arm-chair knitting scarlet wool with two large wooden pins, as Miss Saltoun addressed her; and it was really comical to see the manner in which she dropped her ball of wool into her lap, and sat transfixed, with a wooden pin in either hand, her bead-like eyes staring above her spectacles, and her mouth open like a ring.

Rachel mistook her sentiments altogether.

"Don't feel alarmed about the money," she said. "I told Sir Henry I should give you a year's salary in lieu of notice; and my aunt, Lady Mordaunt, will, I am sure, interest herself at once to get you another situation."

"Oh, it isn't the money, Miss Saltoun—it isn't the money," said the old woman, pathetically.

"You are vexed by so sudden a dismissal, doubtless," replied Rachel, "and you think it is entirely due to the difference that took place between us yesterday. But

you are mistaken. I don't mean to say that I approved of your conduct. I think you altogether forgot your place, and exceeded your duty, but doubtless it would not have occurred again."

"No, no; indeed. I assure you," wailed Miss Montrie.

"But there is another reason," continued Rachel; "I require a brighter, a more active, a—a—in fact, a younger woman than yourself as a companion. You have arrived at the time of life when women need to rest, Miss Montrie, and you see I am just entering upon it. It would be useless to ask you to keep late hours, or to accompany me often to the theatre or other places of amusement, because you couldn't do it; it would knock you up. Do you understand me?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Saltoun, I understand. I was sixty-four on my last birthday, and I am worn out," replied the companion, as she bent over the knitting, on which her tears had commenced to fall.

"No, don't say that," rejoined Rachel, with somewhat less dignity: "you will be fit for many years to come, for an easier situation, but mine will soon cease to be easy. I am no longer in the schoolroom, remember, but neither am I old enough to go so much alone. Pray don't fret about it. Aunt Mary will soon find you a more suitable engagement."

"I'm not fretting about *that*," said Miss Montrie. "I have a home to go to, thank God! and friends that will be pleased to see me!"

"Then what makes you cry?" demanded Rachel.

The companion suddenly cast her knitting to the ground, and hid her face in the cushion of her chair.

"You will be angry with me I know, but I *must* say it. I *love* you, my dear, and it breaks my heart to think of leaving you."

If her footman had suddenly told Miss Saltoun that he loved her, she could hardly have looked more astonished, not to say offended. She rose from her seat with her haughtiest air, and stood upon the hearthrug, silent and distressed. She could not understand what should have

made the common ugly, stupid, little old woman sobbing on the chair cushion *presume* to love her.

Yet Rachel was a woman herself, and did not wish to speak unkindly, but her voice sounded very constrained as she replied,—

“I don’t know what I have ever done to make you regard me as you say, Miss Montrie.”

“Oh, it’s because I don’t see you as others do—it’s because I can read beneath the surface, and know that it’s only your pride that lies like a hard crust over your naturally warm and loving heart.”

“Then that is another reason that we should part,” said Rachel, relentlessly. “I don’t care to keep people about me who read more than I choose they shall read, Miss Montrie. To *you* it may seem all right, but to *me* it appears like an extra impertinence.”

And without another word she left Miss Montrie to enjoy her cry all to herself.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST SALON.

THE exchange was effected. Miss Montrie, sodden with grief which Rachel refused to see, had left Catherstone, and Kate Cranley reigned in her stead. Miss Saltoun liked her new companion far better than her old, and even unbent herself to be more familiar with her. Mrs. Cranley seemed never in the way, yet always to the front when she was needed. She took all the care of the breakfast-table off her employer's hands, and flitted about the old house arranging the flowers or the furniture, altering the position of a chair here, or the folds of a curtain there, until it seemed to bloom afresh beneath her influence. She had exquisite taste, too, both in her dress and her appointments; and her own rooms were soon miraculously transformed from what they had been whilst occupied by Miss Montrie.

Rachel had taste also; but she had passed much of her time in study and in dreaming over her own theories; and like many people who are born to have everything done for them, it had never quite struck her to exercise her sense of the beautiful over such commonplace things as the household furniture. But Kate Cranley had been reared in straitened circumstances, and forced to make things beautiful for herself. She was a clever woman, who had kept her eyes and her ears open through life, and could converse with Rachel on most subjects. She was a horse-woman, moreover, had had a pony during her father's lifetime, and loved the exercise. So that, as soon as Rachel discovered the fact, she mounted her on one of her own horses; and from that time her companion usually accompanied her in her rides.

Still, though Miss Saltoun was both generous and kind, there was always just the unapproachable spot in her character, which Mrs. Cranley had recognized from the first,

and took care not to tread upon. She was not obtrusively humble in her presence, as Miss Montrie had been; but she had the wit to perceive when she was not wanted and a happy capacity of obliterating herself on occasions, which suited Rachel down to the ground.

The *salons* of which they had spoken together were established with the season. On Tuesday night of every week Miss Saltoun was "at home" to receive her friends; and she sent out her cards accordingly.

On these occasions the lovely grounds and terraces of Catherstone were illuminated, and the entire lower suite of rooms, comprising a picture-gallery, a corridor of statuary, a billiard-room opening into a vast conservatory, and the usual sitting-rooms were thrown open for the accommodation of her guests.

The cards of invitation, which extended over the season, were eagerly accepted; for the heiress's liberality was as well known as her income. On all sides poured in demands for more invitations for well-known names, or requests to introduce their owners personally.

Rachel soon found that her weekly reception would number hundreds of people; but she cared for none of them except those who had distinguished themselves in literature or art. She had sent a card, naturally, to Mr. Salter. She wanted to see him at Catherstone, to consult him about the filling of those eight panels in her octagon room, to try and persuade him, in fact, to fill them with his own airy fancies. But, to her secret disappointment, Mr. Salter refused her invitation. He gave no excuse. He simply wrote that he was sorry he was unable to accept it.

Rachel felt mortified—she could hardly say why—but she was too proud to let anyone perceive the feeling.

"Mr. Salter refuses," she observed to Mrs. Cranley as she opened the envelope. "I suppose he considers it so far to come out at night."

"What! half-an-hour's run from town?" exclaimed Kate Cranley. "That is impossible. It must be some more of his priggishness. Depend upon it, Miss Saltoun, he considers himself too much set apart to mix with the common herd. I remember now that Lady Bessant told me he refused

her invitations, and told her he made a practice of going nowhere, because it interfered with his work, or some such rubbish. It is just to make himself talked about. That is all."

"He didn't strike me in that light," replied Rachel, thoughtfully. "Of course his manner might be put on; but it seemed as if his whole soul were in his art. There was no 'bounce' about him, was there?"

"No—o," said Mrs. Cranley, dubiously; "perhaps not—at least, on the surface. But my idea is, that Mr. Salter is a still water that runs deep. Why should he hold aloof from society? Other men in his position don't. They look to society to help them on."

"Perhaps it is true that it interferes with his work, and spoils his conceptions. Mrs. Edwardson, the author, told me once, that she never went anywhere whilst she was writing a novel, because one day's pleasure cost her two days' work."

"But men are not like women, Miss Saltoun. They are always dissipating about somewhere. I would bet anything that Mr. Geoffrey Salter is not unacquainted with the Bohemian Clubs of London, and spends half his nights there. Very likely he has lost all liking for decent society. It is often the way with these artists."

"Oh! then we don't want him here," cried Rachel, shrinking. "Only, why should he dislike the company of polished people, more than Mr. Furley, and Mr. Dickson, and Sir Edward Layman, who are all coming?"

"Perhaps there is someone in the background, Miss Saltoun. Mr. Salter may have some vulgar wife whom he married in his days of obscurity, and whom he would be ashamed to bring forward or introduce to you."

"I only asked *himself*," said Rachel, with a heaving bosom.

"I know. But these low women have a faculty sometimes of pushing themselves into notice—of refusing to be kept in the background, and he may be afraid of the consequences of accepting your invitation."

"Did you ever hear for *certain* that Mr. Salter was married?" demanded Rachel.

"By no means, Miss Saltoun. I don't think anybody knows anything about him. He painted 'The Birth of Spring;' that is sufficient for society. He is a lion, and they want to hear him roar."

"And he *won't* roar," said Rachel, with a *moue*.

"Not at Catherstone, evidently. Perhaps he is frightened by its magnificence."

"But he looks a perfect gentleman. More than that, he is distinguished-looking. I admired his face. What casts that shade of melancholy over it, I wonder? He has the saddest eyes I ever saw."

"It is looking back, perhaps," said Mrs. Cranley, slyly; but Miss Saltoun rebuffed her.

"Whatever he may have to look back upon, I am sure it can be nothing mean or dishonorable, Mrs. Cranley; nor does he appear to me like a man who could ever have taken pleasure in the company of a low-born or vulgar woman. Let us put the most charitable construction on his actions, and lay his objection to society down to his own excuse, that it interferes with his work."

But she did not forget the subject, and on the occasion of her first "at-home," when Mrs. Ommaney referred to it, she asked for her opinion.

"My dear Miss Saltoun," cried that lady, as she sunk into a chair, "I have tired myself out walking round your exquisite garden. How enchanting it looks with all those colored lamps. A little chilly as yet, perhaps, but in a month it will be perfect. Mr. Dickson took me to see the fairy glade, which is so like Mr. Salter's picture. By-the-way, where *is* Mr. Salter? I quite expected to see him here to-night. Have you forgotten the poor young man's name?"

"No, indeed, Mrs. Ommaney! His card went out among the first, but he refused my invitation."

"How strange of him! That is what everybody says. You cannot get hold of him, except on business."

"I wanted to consult him on business. I am so anxious to get him to paint the panels in my octagon room."

"Write to him, then, Miss Saltoun, and he'll come fast enough. I hear he is engaged on the drawing-room of

the great American millionaire, Mrs. Autolycus Mayne. He has a little leisure, I suppose, now that the Royal Academy is open. But if you want him you must secure him at once, or he will be snapped up again. And these artists all run away from London as soon as the season is over."

"I will write to him to-morrow," said Rachel, as she moved away to speak to someone else.

There were plenty of other artists in town who would have painted her panels for her, perhaps, as well as Mr. Salter; but she had set her mind on having a memento of his skill upon the walls of Catherstone.

Perhaps opposition had something to do with her pertinacity; perhaps, also, a little curiosity to learn if Mrs. Cranley's surmises concerning him were true; or, shall we attribute it at once to that mysterious sense of affinity which *does* draw certain persons together in this world, notwithstanding the ridicule of those who have never felt it, and the jeers of the envious crowd.

Certainly Rachel Saltoun found it hard to detach her thoughts from this unknown man and his work, and longed to be better acquainted with him, and to catch, maybe, a reflex of the genius that irradiated his soul. She was interested in him, moreover, and curious to learn something of his antecedents and his surroundings. Had he been crossed in love? Was some woman at the bottom of the profound sadness that looked forth from his dark eyes and of his indifference to the welcome of the world?

Rachel shrugged her shoulders as she thought of it. It was a pity. A genius like Geoffrey Salter should be above allowing earthly feelings to come between him and his divine art. It lowered him somehow in her estimation to imagine him enchained by a woman's smile, or driven to despair by a woman's frown, when his mind should be filled by the conceptions of his genius, and have no room for baser thoughts.

"How do you like my new companion, uncle?" she inquired of Sir Henry Mordaunt, as she came across him in the crush.

"She is very handsome, Ray, there is no doubt of that,"

he answered, glancing at Mrs. Cranley, who, in a perfectly fitting but rather *decolletée* costume, was laughing and talking with some young officers. "And she seems quite able to hold her own."

"That is just what I want her to do," replied his niece. Mrs. Cranley is a lady, and able to help me to amuse my guests. I have had to do it all for myself hitherto."

"Where has poor Miss Montrie gone?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Home to her friends, I suppose."

"Have you seen her since she left you?"

"No, uncle; and, to tell you the truth, I do not wish to see her. I don't like being patted and cried over. I told her to go to Aunt Mary if she wanted another engagement; so I daresay she'll be crying over you in the course of a week or two."

"Ah! Ray, Ray, you have no heart," said Sir Henry.

"I don't think I have," she answered gayly as she passed away in the crowd.

The baronet looked after her admiringly. She was dressed entirely in soft creamy white surah silk, with a rope of oriental pearls tied round her throat, and a bunch of Parma violets in her belt. Her abundant chestnut hair was coiled about her shapely head, and her eyes, generally rather cold and serious, were gleaming brightly; whilst excitement and pleasure had called up a crimson flush into either cheek. She was looking her very best—indeed, almost handsome—and quite charming. Wherever she moved she was followed by a galaxy of young men, all anxious to attract her attention; but she received their compliments with the utmost indifference, and appeared to take quite as much pleasure from the conversation of her female friends.

"What an attractive woman she is," thought Sir Henry, "putting her fortune entirely out of the question; so independent, high-spirited, and frank, just the sort of woman to be led away by her own determination of character into making some imprudent marriage, and because every one else disapproved of it. How I wish she would settle down sensibly with some good fellow like Vivian."

I never saw Ray look as well as she does to-night in her life before."

The whole entertainment went off brilliantly. The guests did not disperse till a late hour, and all declared they had enjoyed themselves to the top of their bent. Rachel Saltoun and Kate Cranley were nearly tired out, but they looked at each other triumphantly as they were left alone.

"Well, Miss Saltoun, it was a success," remarked the companion.

"A very great success," replied Rachel, with sparkling eyes. "Did you hear Madame Ludovico sing that last song? They applauded her as though they had been in a theatre. Yes; I think I may say I collected together as many 'big guns' to-night, as were ever seen in one set of rooms before. And they all declared they should come next Tuesday. The *salons* are an accepted fact, Mrs. Cranley, and I have to thank you for a great deal of the success of their establishment."

"I did what I could to keep the ball rolling, Miss Saltoun," replied Kate Cranley, modestly. "I supposed it to be part of my duty."

"You managed everything capitally," said Rachel, approvingly. "I am much obliged to you. The evening has been simply perfect."

But as the heiress ascended to her own apartment, she heaved a desultory sigh. The evening had certainly been brilliant, but something was wrong, something so slight, that Rachel had actually to think before she could recall the fact that she was piqued by Mr. Salter's absence; and that the little uncomfortable feeling that pervaded her, was due to the surmises thrown out by Mrs. Cranley, concerning his reason for refusing her invitation.

"What nonsense!" she thought to herself, as she caught the fugitive annoyance, and recognized its insignificance. "What earthly difference can it make to me what the man is, or does, so long as he will paint my panels? I will write to him to-morrow, just as if he were a tradesman, and ask his terms for doing what I require. No. On second thoughts, I will not write to him. I will

make Mrs. Cranley my secretary, and then Mr. Salter will see what a purely mercenary transaction I intend it to be between us. I wish to goodness I had never sent him a card of invitation."

She broached the subject at breakfast the following morning.

"I spoke to Mrs. Ommaney last night about that artist, Mr. Salter, you know, and his painting the panels of the octagon room. She says he never goes out, except on business; and that, if I want him, I had better secure him before the season is over. So you will kindly write him a note, Mrs. Cranley, and say what I require—eight panels filled with views of Catherstone; and ask when he will be at liberty to execute the order, and what he will charge?"

Kate Cranley looked aghast.

"Pardon me, Miss Saltoun, but would not such a letter come better from yourself?"

"I don't see why it should. You can write as my secretary, in my name. I consider it such a piece of impertinence his refusing my invitation, that I don't care to address the man myself."

"Wouldn't some other artist do as well as Mr. Salter? Mr. Pixon painted Mrs. Auriol's drawing-room exquisitely."

"No. I wish Mr. Salter to do it. I want to speak to him, also, about the purchase of 'The Awakening of the Soul.'"

"But is it usual, Miss Saltoun, to ask a gentleman his terms before he has decided the time the designs will take him to execute?"

"Perhaps not. Don't mention terms, then, but write and ask if he will consent to paint the panels? I want to have Catherstone inside the house, as well as out."

Mrs. Cranley, therefore, did as she was desired, and the result was, that by return of post a note arrived, intimating that Mr. Geoffrey Salter would do himself the honor of waiting personally on Miss Saltoun the following Saturday at two o'clock, in order to ascertain her wishes on the subject of the adornment of the octagon room.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OCTAGON ROOM.

RACHEL was secretly exultant over this letter, but she would not let Mrs. Cranley guess it.

"So his lordship will really condescend to honor Catherstone with his presence," she exclaimed, mockingly, as she perused it. "Pray see, Mrs. Cranley, that we have a luncheon-table fit to ask him to sit down to on the occasion. Don't let him go back and complain of the inhospitality of Catherstone. It will take some little time for me to explain to him what I require."

On the day appointed she did not invite her companion to join her in the library, and consequently she received the young artist alone.

Mr. Salter did not appear to be inclined to give himself any airs as he entered her presence—on the contrary, he seemed very modest. He colored beautifully as he touched her offered hand (and coloring was very becoming to him), but he smiled frankly at the same time, and took a chair with the greatest ease beside her.

"I am honored by your commission, Miss Saltoun," he commenced, "but as the letter I received did not make it quite clear to me, I thought it better, before accepting it, that I should ask to see you."

"Certainly, Mr. Salter, and I can explain it to you in a few minutes. I have an eight-sided drawing-room, the panels of which are at present blank spaces. I want to have them filled with artistic sketches—with *your* sketches, if you will undertake the commission—of various parts of my estate. I have a fine park at the back of the house with many picturesque glades and openings, which have been my play-grounds since a child. I have a great fancy to see these mementos of my happy childhood reproduced upon my walls. How long would it take you to do them?"

"May I ask to see the panels?" he said, shortly.

Rachel rose, and preceded him to a large room which opened from the statuary corridor, and commanded views of the park. It was panelled in white and gold after the French fashion of a century ago, and ornamented with pink cupids and blue love-knots, and the furniture was *en suite*.

Mr. Salter stood in the centre of the room, and turned himself slowly round, taking in its capabilities.

"If I undertake the work I must have all that paint and gilding off," he said, presently, "and the room will have to be refurnished also under my directions."

"I will give you *carte blanche* to issue your own orders, if you will only make my dear grounds bloom for me here all the year round."

"You love your place very much, Miss Saltoun," he observed, looking at her scrutinizingly for the first time.

"Love it?" she echoed. "Would you not love a place that had been handed down to you through a cycle of four hundred years? Catherstone came to me from my mother, who was a Norreys of Catherstone and Fernleigh. She traced her pedigree up to John of Gaunt, and her forefathers bore arms for the crown for centuries, without a single bar sinister upon their escutcheon. Isn't that something to be proud of? Of course, I am proud of my father, too. I suppose you know that he was the son of the Duke of Craig-Morris, my dear old grand-dad, who is still alive, and thinks me a very shocking young woman for presuming to have a will of my own, and spending my money as I choose. He would say this fancy of mine was a piece of extravagance; but you love art, Mr. Salter, and you will understand how I feel when I say I would like to spend all my fortune upon it."

"Yes, I quite understand," he answered, frankly.

"I suppose, to paint these panels would take a lot of time, Mr. Salter?"

"I am afraid I could not do them to my own satisfaction under two months."

"Don't say 'afraid.' I assure you Roehampton and all its environs are very charming, and I think you might

manage to make your life bearable here for that amount of time."

"I was not thinking of that, Miss Saltoun. I have been obliged to spend three months in Manchester before now. It all comes in the way of business. I was calculating the expense. I am afraid it may come to more than you dream of."

"Oh, never mind that. I mean to have my panels. What will they come to?"

"I can't tell you exactly."

"Two thousand pounds?"

"Oh! no—no! Nothing like it. I will sketch in the panels for you at one hundred pounds a piece. The cost of the furniture you can decide for yourself. Only it must be old English, and not Louis Quinze. Something more in the style that your celebrated ancestors would have indulged in," he added, quietly.

"Not wooden settles and straw rushes, I hope," replied Miss Saltoun, gayly; for she was quite elated to think she had gained her point at last. Mr. Salter was actually coming to the house to be her guest for two whole months. Now he would see what he had lost by his indifference to her invitation, and indeed it was much the same idea that had made her indulge the artist with an account of her grand progenitors.

"When can you begin them, Mr. Salter," she asked, eagerly.

"Oh! not yet a while, Miss Saltoun," was the measured reply. "Mrs. Mayne's order will occupy me for some weeks to come. But if you want to leave home, you know, it will make no difference to me. Once you have given your order, I can work just as well, perhaps better, if the house were empty. Yours shall be my next task. I can promise you so much."

"Thank you. But I shall not leave Catherstone until the autumn. It was you whom I feared would be going away."

"No. I have nowhere to go," replied the artist, simply.

"You will want to take sketches of my favorite spots first, Mr. Salter."

"Yes ; I will run down some afternoon, with your permission, Miss Saltoun, and you shall point them out to me. But they will not be in their perfection for another month."

"You would not have said so if you had seen them lighted up last Tuesday," Rachel ventured to remark. "Everyone agreed they looked lovely. Why didn't you come? So many people asked after you. I think you would have enjoyed yourself."

Geoffry Salter looked a little uneasy, as he replied,—

"I am sure I should, and I thank you very much for your invitation, Miss Saltoun ; but, as I think I told you the other day, I have no time for visiting."

Then Rachel remembered what he had said about "domestic duties," and his "own people," and adding it to Mrs. Cranley's innuendoes, came to the conclusion that he must be a married man.

Unlike most of her thoughts it flew to her lips, and she asked him, abruptly,—

"Are you married?"

Mr. Salter blushed and laughed, and blushed again, until the blood had mounted to the very parting of his hair, as he replied,—

"No, thank God!—a thousand times no. Whatever made you think so?"

Then, having gained her point and relieved her mind, Rachel chose to feel affronted, because the young man had disparaged her sex, by thanking God that he was not tied in bondage to any one of them.

"Oh, you consider it a matter of rejoicing," she asked brusquely. "Doubtless, there is a woman somewhere in the world, who might say the same whilst thinking of you."

"You are quite right, Miss Saltoun," he replied, recovering his gravity; and I congratulate that young woman (should she exist) sincerely. Mine has been a life of struggle, quite bad enough to bear by myself, without dragging another down with me. I am, and I always shall be, better alone."

"Then you don't consider marriage a necessary adjunct to earthly happiness?"

"On the contrary, I believe it is far oftener a cause of misery than pleasure."

"So do I. I am always arguing the subject with my uncle, Sir Henry Mordaunt; but he cannot see with my eyes. The love of art is the greatest happiness this world can afford us, and the love of study the best occupation. Marriage seems to interfere with both. People are so seldom properly mated. But when one is free—absolutely free—to go where one likes, and do as one likes, and think as one likes—oh, it is unmitigated bliss. There is nothing to compare with it."

"Yes; while one is young, and possesses unlimited means," said Geoffrey Salter. "But I can tell you a surer panacea for the troubles of life, Miss Saltoun, than even liberty. Hard work and plenty of it; it leaves you no time for thought."

"But you will soon get beyond the necessity for work, Mr. Salter. You are nearly at the top of the tree already."

"Oh, no, only on the first rung of the ladder. If I live, I hope to climb much higher. But did I gain the very topmost bough, I should never cease to work. It is my life."

"You are as fond of your art, Mr. Salter, as I am of Catherstone."

"Much fonder, Miss Saltoun, if the truth were known. You love your property as a child loves its mother. You were born here. It has been familiar to you from your earliest associations. But I love painting as a father loves the child who has grown up beneath his eyes."

"And that is the greater love of the two!"

"Unquestionably. The child's love is founded upon gratitude. The parent's love is born before the child. Look at God's love for us. Is it not greater than our love for Him?"

"You believe in God, then, Mr. Salter?"

The artist turned and looked at her with amazement.

He was not what is termed, a religious man—not strict, that is to say, in the duties enjoined by the churches. He never attended public worship. He did not believe in its sincerity. He was very sensitive to outer influences, and

the humbug and worldly artificiality of the so-called worshippers jarred upon his mind, and made the ceremonial almost revolting to him.

But he could hardly be an artist, in the true sense of the word (so he thought), and deny, or even doubt, the existence of a God.

He had been reared by good and affectionate parents, in the loving atmosphere of home, and it sounded like sacrilege to him to hear such a doubt, as Rachel Saltoun had expressed, from the lips of a woman.

"*Do I believe in God?*" he reiterated. "Why, of course I do. And so do you, Miss Saltoun, surely?"

They were standing together in one of the recesses of the drawing-room as he spoke to her, and she looked down and caught up an enamelled paper-knife, and began playing with it, as she replied, rather confusedly:

"I really don't know, sometimes, *what* to believe. I was brought up all right, you know; but since I have been my own mistress, I have read all sorts of books, and my reasoning powers are somewhat *bouleversés*. I am fond of German literature and have studied Kant and——"

"Yes, yes. I understand," interposed Mr. Salter; "you have read yourself into unbelief. That is one of the blessings of your liberty. I have, also, read the authors you allude to; but their arguments had no effect on my mind, because I held a talisman against them."

"And what was that?" demanded Rachel, with interest.

"My mother's goodness, and her love for me. Whilst I remember that, Miss Saltoun, I can never doubt the existence of the God who created her and gave her to me."

"Your mother lives still?"

"Thank God! yes. And long may she do so. She has been my sheet-anchor through life."

"You are very fortunate to possess a mother," said Rachel, in a softened voice; "mine died when I was fourteen—just when I needed her most, and my father followed her within the year. I have been very unlucky. It was almost enough to make me doubt if there was a Creator watching over me. Wasn't it?"

"No," replied the young man bluntly, "I can't see it in that light, though yours was an incalculable loss. But we are drifting somewhat away from our purpose. If you will kindly tell me which day will be convenient for you to point out the spots you wish transferred to your panels, I will book the appointment before I leave."

"Could you stay this afternoon? I am quite at liberty."

"I am sorry I cannot. I have an engagement elsewhere at four o'clock."

"But you will surely stay to lunch with us? It is ready. The bell sounded some minutes since."

All Geoffrey Salter's reserve seemed to have returned to him. He had evidently been drawn out of it by the interest of the subject alone. Now he became the artist of the studio again.

"I am much obliged, but I cannot stay. If you will let me know on which day I can see you for the purpose I have named——"

"But, Mr. Salter, it is on the table. It need not detain you five minutes. And I will order the dogcart to take you back to the station."

"I prefer walking, really. I am a great walker. If I had time, I should go back to London now on foot, instead of taking the train."

"But do have something, and a glass of wine before you start. You will make me feel quite unhappy," said Rachel.

"I am sorry for that, but it is inevitable. Will Wednesday week suit you to show me the sites for my sketches, Miss Saltoun?" inquired Mr. Salter, with his note-book in his hand.

"Oh, yes, certainly; if you are determined not to stay," she answered, with a slight amount of pique. "Perhaps I may see you to luncheon then, at two o'clock, Mr. Salter?"

"Thank you very much, but I never take luncheon," he said, still intent on his note-book. "Wednesday week then, at three-thirty. I shall be punctual, Miss Saltoun. Good-afternoon!"

And, with a bow, Mr. Salter walked out of the house. Rachel returned to the luncheon-room, where Mrs. Cranley awaited her, slightly out of temper.

"Why! where's the great man?" exclaimed Kate Cranley. "Isn't he to be your guest to-day?"

"No; he can't stay! He has another appointment at four."

"And have you arranged everything satisfactorily, Miss Saltoun? And have you bought 'The Awakening of the Soul?'"

"Dear me, no! I forgot all about it," replied Rachel. "We were so busy talking about the drawing-room panels. *That* is all arranged, however, and Mr. Salter is coming over on Wednesday week to choose the best views for sketching. They are to cost eight hundred pounds. Not dear, I think, when you consider the size of the panels."

Mrs. Cranley shrugged her shoulders.

"You're a happy young lady to be able to think so, Miss Saltoun. However, I suppose it is not dear, as I hear that he received fifteen hundred pounds for his Academy picture of last year. What a lucky man to be able to coin money so fast!"

"But look at the labor. Mr. Salter says the eight panels will take him quite two months to finish. I shall not let any visitors into the drawing-room till they are completed. And it is to be refurnished in the old English style to suit the sketches. Mr. Salter said the present chairs and tables would kill his work. We shall have great fun, Mrs. Cranley, in choosing everything."

"And will Mr. Salter stay at Catherstone during the progress of his work?"

"Why, of course. You would not have the poor man travel backwards and forwards from London every day? We must give him a bedroom and smoking-room to himself. And I have a great project in my head, though I hardly know how I shall broach it to him. Do you think he would allow me to sit by him when he takes his sketches, and work on them at the same time? It would be such an immense help to me! And you, too, Mrs. Cranley. We might pitch our easels a little behind his,

and work over his shoulder. Do you think he would consent?"

"He will consent to anything *you* ask him, Miss Saltoun. *You* are his patroness, and can advance him in the social world. But for poor *me*, who am without influence or money—why should he wish to benefit *me*?"

"Oh! that is putting it in a very nasty way," cried Rachel; "I wasn't thinking of advantage or gain, or anything of that sort. I simply meant, could I be bold enough to ask it of him as a friend?"

"Oh! if you are going to make a *friend* of him," said Kate Cranley, "of course that is a different matter, and just between him and you."

Rachel felt vexed at the turn which had been given to the conversation, and said no more.

"He is certainly excessively handsome," remarked Mrs. Cranley, after a pause. "I saw him walking through the corridor with you, and his face is perfectly beautiful *en profile*. Just like that of a statue."

"Of whom are you speaking?" inquired Miss Saltoun.

"Of Mr. Salter."

"Oh!" said the heiress indifferently, so she rose and left the table.

CHAPTER VII.

GEOFFREY'S FATHER.

MR. SLATER'S studio was erected on a piece of ground which had originally formed the front garden of the six-roomed cottage behind it. A side path led to the private dwelling-house, and as Geoffrey hurried up it on the afternoon he left Catherstone, and found that it was nearer five o'clock than four, he burst into the little parlor, and rushed to the side of a gray-haired man, who was seated by the window, reading the newspaper.

"My dear father, I am late; I have kept you waiting; I am so sorry!" he exclaimed impetuously as he wrung his father's hand.

"My dear boy, there is nothing to apologize for. I know you have many business appointments, and cannot always command your own time. I have not been here more than half-an-hour."

"I am glad of that," replied his son; "but I would sooner the whole world went to the wall than you should think yourself neglected. But the fact is, I've been out to Roehampton to see a lady about some decorations; and you know when the sex begin to talk how difficult it is for a man to break away. I only hope the dinner may not be spoiled. If it is, you must come and dine with me at the club instead."

It would have been difficult to recognize Geoffrey Salter, as he talked to his father, for the taciturn, reserved artist, who held himself so proudly aloof from the society of his patrons. His manner, his voice, his very face seemed altered. He looked like an impatient boy, as he laid aside his hat and stick, and called to Mrs. Keen to serve the dinner.

"How are they all at home," he asked affectionately,

as he drew a seat by that of his father, and laid his hand on his.

"All well, Geoffrey. The girls particularly brisk, because they have a ball in prospect; and we have received a most satisfactory letter from Will. I have brought it to show you. It's only Jack who, as usual, considers himself above his work, and grumbles night and day if he is asked to do it."

"Jack worries you, father. I can see that. It is a shame! Surely, out of four sons, you may expect to keep one to help you in the business."

"The man who has *one* son like you, Geoffrey, can well afford to be worried occasionally by a Jack," said Mr. Salter.

He was a fine man, tall and erect, not past middle-age, and with a thick head of hair and a bushy beard, which had only just began to turn gray. His eyes were dark and piercing, and his nose prominent.

He did not in the least resemble his son, who took after his delicate, fragile mother, but he possessed the strong characteristics of the Scottish race—determination, pride, caution, and a capacity for business; qualities which Geoffrey had, in a great measure, inherited from him.

"Well, if that is the case," exclaimed his son, "why won't you let me prove my supposed value, father, by helping you above such worries? Why should you and my dear mother go on toiling, whilst I make more money than I can spend? Let us take a nice house in the country somewhere, and all live together, and—"

"Sponge upon you, Geoffrey," interrupted Mr. Salter. "No, my boy, no, not whilst I have a stroke of work left in me. We are very proud of you, Geoffrey, and we rejoice in your good fortune; but it is for your sake, not our own—"

"I know that, father, well enough; but of what good is it to me unless you share it? I have just agreed to take eight hundred pounds for a couple of months' work; and my Academy picture will bring in, perhaps, two thousand. What am I to do with so much money?"

"Lay it by, my son, and make a fund against the

chances of sickness and old age. You do too much for us as it is. Sometimes I feel almost annoyed at your generosity to your brothers and sisters. It makes them disposed to be idle and discontented. I don't mean to say, Geoffrey, that if I die before I have made a sufficient provision for her, I should not expect you to take care of your dear mother."

"Oh, father! you know I would—of her and of all of them."

"No! that wouldn't be fair. Your brothers and sisters must work for themselves, as you have done. But your mother, Geoffrey, she has been a good mother to you——"

"The very best and dearest of mothers, father."

"And she is very fragile, and not fit to work for her living. I should commend her to your loving, filial care, Geoffrey, with my last breath."

"Father! you don't feel ill? There is nothing the matter?" exclaimed his son, in alarm.

"No, no, my boy. I am hearty as yet, thank God. But I have not been fortunate of late. Business is very slack, and sometimes I feel low-spirited about it, and wonder how it will all end."

"Let me put a few hundreds into it, father. I have money lying in the bank, and waiting to be invested. Why shouldn't you use it? It would give me so much pleasure."

His earnest, glowing face was upraised to his father's, and it may be supposed that Mr. Salter saw something in its expression that reminded him of the time when Geoffrey was a child and the pride of his mother's heart, for he inclined his head forward, and kissed his son gently on the forehead.

"No, my dearest boy, I have no need for it, at all events, at present. Thank you all the same. And now let us talk of something else. I didn't come here to discuss my affairs, but yours. Your mother and I were at the Academy last week, to have another look at the 'Awakening.' It is a grand picture, Geoffrey, and it made us so proud to hear the people saying so."

"Yes. I have been very fortunate in hitting the public

taste," replied the young man, modestly. "But here is the dinner, father. Only a fried sole and a roast chicken; but I know your tastes are as simple as my own. Mrs. Keen, let us have a bottle of Burgundy with the yellow seal, please, and a bottle of champagne. Oh, father! how I wish I could sit down with you like this every day. I am very lonely all by myself sometimes."

"What! the fashionable, rising, young artist lonely!" exclaimed Mr. Salter. "I thought you received more invitations than you could accept."

"So I do, and never feel more lonely than when I accept them. I go because it is good for trade; but you know, father, why I must feel set apart from such society."

"I don't know why you should. You are good enough to mix with the highest in the land, in my opinion."

"But not in theirs."

"What! are you ashamed of your origin, and of your own people, Geoff?"

"Never, father! What need to ask me such a question? It is because I am as proud of them as any nobleman could be of his, that I will never do anything to bring myself under the censure of those who might think otherwise. I must mix with them occasionally for the sake, as I said before, of business. But I never go voluntarily, and I never intrude myself on their privacy. No one of them shall ever have it in his power to say hereafter, that I pushed myself into a society that considers itself above me."

"You are very proud, Geoffrey."

"I am too proud, father, to lay myself open to a snubbing. A great deal too proud, and all the more so because I feel myself to be as good as the best of them."

"You are as good, my boy; and not only because of your genius. I think you must have heard rumors, Geoffrey, that our name was not originally Salter?"

"I have, but I have never paid any attention to them. When was it changed?"

"Nearly two centuries ago, when one of your ancestors found himself compelled, through adverse circumstances, to do what he considered a degradation to his family, that

is, to go into business. Your mother and I have been talking the matter over lately, and we wonder whether it would not be advisable for you, now that you are becoming so well known, to resume your legal title."

"What! after two hundred years? And would you resume it too?"

"No, Geoffrey; not in my present position."

"Then neither will I, and I don't even want to know what the name originally was. I have been born a Salter, and I will die a Salter. Why, the most aristocratic name in England would not sound half so sweet to me as plain Geoffrey Salter, R.A."

"Well, I daresay you're right, my boy. It isn't the name that ennobles the man, after all; it is the man who ennobles the name. And now, tell me where you have been this afternoon?"

"To a lovely place called Catherstone, which belongs to Miss Saltoun."

The elder man laid down his knife and fork.

"What name did you say, Geoffrey?"

"The Honorable Rachel Saltoun, a well-known society heiress. She's an awful swell—or she considers herself so—a grand-daughter of the Duke of Craig-Morris. She entertained me with an account of half her pedigree this afternoon."

"Oh, indeed. Is she an old lady?"

"No; quite young. About one-and-twenty, I suppose."

"Handsome?"

"Not at all. She came to my studio a few weeks back, with a lot of other women, and I never noticed her. She is a tall, slight girl, with a lot of reddish hair, and a peaky nose. She is not at all unlike our Nelly—though Heaven forbid she should hear me say so—only her eyes are blue instead of brown. I thought her quite plain till she began to talk; and then I saw she could be very charming if she chose. She has such a flow of language, and such an animated manner. But she's disgustingly proud. I don't think I shall care about her."

"Isn't that rather like pot calling the kettle black?" asked his father slyly.

"Not at all. Miss Saltoun is proud, not of herself, nor her talents, but of her birth and her long line of ancestors. She despises commoners ; and as for tradesmen—well, I suppose she looks on them as she does on her domestic servants, as necessary nuisances, that to come in immediate contact with is to be polluted."

"I suppose you lunched there, Geoffrey ?"

"No I didn't. She asked me, but I declined. I have no intention of putting myself under Miss Saltoun's heel. I will do my work at Catherstone as a house painter might, and then pocket my fees and go. She shall never say that I presumed in the slightest degree on her condescension."

"She does condescend, then ?"

"She is very amiable, and professes to think a great deal of my work. And she is very rich (Mrs Ommaney, a friend of hers, told me she had fifteen thousand a year), and able to pay for her whims. The latest is to have the panels of her drawing-room filled with sketches from her own grounds. There are eight of them. They will take me two months to do."

"And you will live for that time at Catherstone ? Be careful, my dear boy, and don't get into a scrape with this young lady, who can be so charming when she chooses."

Geoffrey Salter burst out laughing.

"My dear father. Get into a scrape ? Do you mean lose my heart to her ? There's no more chance of that than if I had received an order to re-decorate Windsor Castle, and fell in love with the Queen. Besides, I shall not live at Catherstone—of course not. In the first place, Miss Saltoun has said nothing about it ; and in the second, I shouldn't accept the invitation if she did. I shall stay at the Roehampton Arms if the weather is bad. If not, I shall sleep here, and ride over every morning. A gallop does me more good than a tonic."

"How soon do you commence at Catherstone ?"

"In a fortnight or three weeks. As soon as I have finished Mrs. Mayne's. That is a grand piece of work, father. I wish you would go over to Queen's Gate with me and see it. Four frescoes on the dining-room walls,

representing the alliance between England and America. I asked a large sum for them ; but there was not the slightest demur. These rich Americans will pay anything to make a big show."

"Yes—yes," said Mr. Salter indifferently. "But about this young lady, Miss Saltoun, Geoffrey? I quite appreciate the delicacy of your feelings regarding pushing yourself into the company of anyone. But don't let it go too far. Your family may be in a lower grade of society than hers ; but you have good blood in your veins, my boy, and no need to be ashamed of it."

"I am not ashamed of it," replied the young man, proudly ; "in fact, I deny the power of good blood (as you call it) to render a man any more of a gentleman than his fellows. Education may do it, but not the mere accident of birth. I have met with noblemen and officers who were unmitigated cads, who have said and done things that I would have died sooner than be guilty of. And I know men at this moment who were originally sons of the soil, but whom Art, and the sensitiveness that generally accompanies intellectual gifts, have raised to be truly gentlemen. And, for myself, father, I have to thank you and my dear mother for the early training, and liberal education you gave me, for what I am. I may have, as you say, good blood in my veins, but I don't think I should have been any different had it been otherwise."

"Perhaps not, my boy—perhaps not," replied Mr. Salter ; "but don't think too humbly of yourself, that's all. For you will marry some day, Geoffrey, and you must marry well."

"I shall never marry," said Geoffrey.

"It's early days to say that, my dear. There's plenty of time before you yet. Let me see. How old are you?"

"Twenty-seven. But if I were forty-seven, it would be all the same. I have no wish for marriage, and for the reason I have told you. For the last six years I have been gradually raising myself to the level of my patrons. I cannot hope to take a wife from amongst them. Were I to suggest such a thing, I should be called presumptuous. And yet, I certainly could not——could not——"

But here Geoffrey hesitated to proceed.

"You mean," said his father, "that you could not bring yourself to descend again to marry a woman from the same sphere of society as your mother and your sisters?"

"No, no, father; please don't mention their names in connection with the subject. You know how different they are from the majority. But the girls I used to mix with long ago—Nelly's and Emmie's friends—you must understand, you must feel that they would drag me down, rather than raise me in the work to which I have dedicated my life."

"Yes; I understand perfectly. Your genius has raised you above your fellows, but is powerless to cope with the accidents of birth and surroundings. It is hard lines for you, Geoffrey."

"I don't think so," said his son, cheerfully. "I don't want a wife; she would either bore me by her want of sympathy, or interfere with the progress of my art. Work, such as mine, requires freedom and solitude for thought. Believe me, father, I am far better and happier as I am. And now, when shall I go over and see mother? I want to take her and my sisters to the new French play; they would enjoy it immensely."

And the rest of the time that Geoffrey Salter and his father spent together was passed in conversation concerning home matters, without any further reference being made to the young artist's private feelings.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FAIRIES' GLADE.

RACHEL SALTOUN pretended not to be at all anxious for her next meeting with Geoffrey Salter—pretended, in fact, to have forgotten all about it, until Mrs. Cranley reminded her that it was fixed for Wednesday week at three o'clock in the afternoon.

And then she declared, in a pettish manner, that it was excessively provoking, for it was such a lovely afternoon; she had made up her mind to ride in Richmond Park.

"But if it were not fine, dear Miss Saltoun, you would not be able to point out your favorite views to Mr. Salter," suggested Kate Cranley.

"Oh, true. I know it is inevitable, but it is a bore."

Nevertheless, as she changed her dress for the occasion, Miss Saltoun felt, if not excited, at all events expectant of some pleasure.

The young artist was true to his time. He had never permitted his genius to make him forget business, or give himself airs concerning punctuality.

As he came forward to greet her, Rachel thought he looked handsomer than ever, but that was because he was overcoming his first shyness with a stranger.

"I hope you have brought your sketch-book with you," she cried.

"Oh, yes. You don't think, I hope, that I could forget the chief factor in our appointment of to-day. I am quite ready to proceed to the park at once, if it is convenient to you to take me there."

Rachel would have liked to converse with him a little first, but he did not even take a seat, so she had no alternative but to lead the way out of the house.

She had received him in the library, and as they quitted the room, she saw Geoffrey glance up with admiration at

the rows of valuable volumes arranged upon the shelves.

"Do you love reading, Mr. Salter?" she asked, abruptly,

"Very much, indeed. Nothing better. My greatest relaxation, after work, is to dive into a well-written book. I can lose myself and my worries there for hours."

"Oh, what can you have to worry you, with all your life and your art before you?" exclaimed Rachel.

"Not much, Miss Saltoun. My greatest worry is that of not being able to reach the conceptions in my mind, and make them live upon the canvas. To imagine an angel, and give birth to a second-rate mortal. That is the artist's greatest trouble."

"And you can read yourself content again?"

"In a great measure."

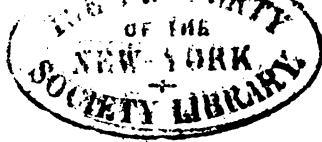
"You can have free access to my library, Mr. Salter, whilst you are painting my walls; and you will find much that is interesting here. I *live* in this room. Like yourself, I can forget, whilst in it, the outside world and all its irritating folly. You must take the opportunity whilst at Catherstone, to read a great deal."

But Geoffrey had shrunk into his shell again.

"Thank you, Miss Saltoun; but I must work hard when I have once begun, and shall have no leisure, I fear, for anything else. I intend simply to take pencil sketches of the places you wish, this afternoon," he said, producing a small block from his pocket, "and shall work out the color and detail in my mind's eye afterwards. It is fortunate we have such a lovely afternoon. Perhaps we had better be going; it is past three already."

Rachel preceded him at once to the terrace at the back of the house. She could not quite understand his manner. He was polite enough, and yet he certainly seemed to throw cold water upon any attempt at familiarity between them. Well, he might keep to himself then. She was sure that she had no wish to be on intimate terms with him.

She was dressed very becomingly that afternoon, in a costume of different shades of olive-green, and as she was thinking thus, Geoffrey was admiring the warm ruddy tint



of her coils of hair, contrasted with the green of the broad-brimmed felt hat above them, and the easy sway of her lithe figure as she walked before him.

As they emerged from the house they stepped on a broad terrace, protected by stone balustrades, and ornamented with large orange trees and other shrubs planted in green tubs from one end to the other. Beneath the terrace was a smooth sward, sprinkled with flower-beds, now in their richest beauty, and bordered by an invisible fence, beyond which the park trees reared their stately heads.

"How beautiful," exclaimed Geoffrey. "What a lovely spot."

His warm praise brought the color to Miss Saltoun's usually pale cheeks.

"Oh! this is nothing. You have not seen half—not a quarter of Catherstone. The park comprises two thousand acres. You can quite lose yourself in the centre. There, to the left, is the shrubbery that leads to it. To the right are the flower-gardens and the lake. There is a sweet little nook over the bridge that I want you to sketch. My stables lie to the left, you see, close to the house; but my fruit-garden and hot-houses, and home farm are to the right, beyond the flowers. Oh, you will love it all when you know it. Catherstone is the dearest place in the world. But I have another farm, a very big one, in Sussex—Fernleigh. Sometimes I take a party of friends down there for a few weeks in the summer, the air is so invigorating; but my heart is at Catherstone all the time. It is the best of my possessions, and I shall never really care for any other place."

"You are fortunate in being the mistress of it," said Geoffrey Salter, quietly.

Her constant allusion to the ownership of the property, the continual use of the possessive pronoun—"my gardens," "my park," "my farms"—jarred upon him. He did not envy her one little bit, nor did he depreciate the value of her possessions; but her repeated reminder of the fact seemed to put them apart each time that they had a chance of becoming better acquainted.

"But you don't admire it as much as I thought you would," she said, with an air of disappointment.

"Indeed I do admire it. Have I not said so?"

"What makes you look so grave then?"

"I was only wondering which you loved best—your property or your art?"

Rachel's color rose.

"You mean—if I had to choose between them, would I give up Catherstone, or obliterate the art from its walls and corridors? Oh, don't ask me. I could not argue such a question. This place stands almost in lieu of my parents to me. I was born, I have grown up here. It is almost as much me as myself. We Saltouns are very 'clannish,' Mr. Salter. We cling to the old places and the old people, and we should consider the world well lost for the old name. At all times, when a member of the family (thank God! their names are few) has done anything to disgrace it, we have cut him off, root and branch, even if we have had to tear out our own hearts in doing so. We are very proud, you see, and terribly exclusive."

"I do see!"

"Why! do you know," she cried, suddenly wheeling round, so as to face him, "that once, years and years ago, one of our relations did a disgraceful thing, and we drove him straight away from us, as Ishmael was driven into the wilderness, and acknowledged him no more. His parents and his brothers and sisters tore him from their hearts. They sacrificed their affections to the honor of their family, and that is how the Saltouns think of themselves, Mr. Salter."

"Yes?" he answered, interrogatingly.

"And so, you can see," continued Rachel, rather less triumphantly than before, "how we must value the property and the acres that have come down to us through generations of unstained names. Don't you consider it a noble thing, Mr. Salter, to sacrifice one's private feelings for the honor of one's family?"

"Perhaps."

"Only perhaps!"

"Well, I think it depends entirely upon the delinquent. What did he do?"

"Oh, I cannot tell you. It was shocking, disgraceful! I cannot bear to think of it. But, thank goodness, he belongs to us no more. Perhaps he died and left no descendants. He can have had no true blood in him."

"Well, I daresay, he or his children are none the worse for it," observed Geoffrey.

"*Mr. Salter!*" exclaimed Rachel, indignantly.

"I trust I have not offended you, Miss Saltoun; but I do not think that happiness is dependent on being either wealthy or highly born. No one is really happy in this world; but the poor have their share as well as the rich. But perhaps we had better not discuss such things, for you will find me a terrible radical, and I conclude such sentiments will not agree with your own."

"They will not, indeed," replied Rachel, with a swelling breast, as she led the way down a flight of marble steps to the entrance of the shrubbery.

She had not overrated the beauties of her estate. There were some lovely nooks and glades in the little park.

First, she took the artist to an opening in the trees, where a brook babbled over a narrow bed of stones, fringed with forget-me-nots and water-weeds.

"Here," she said, "I used to play for hours when a child, sailing my paper boats upon the water, and waiting for the fairies I had read about to visit me. I have lain on the grass here for hours," she added, with a sudden heavy sigh, "dreaming dreams that never came to pass. I planted that yellow-wort, and those field daisies myself. I used to call it 'The Fairies' Glade.'"

"It is worthy of the name," said Geoffrey. "From which point will you have it taken, and shall it be by sunlight or moonlight?"

"Oh, by moonlight; and if you would introduce some fairies, I should be so pleased. They would look quite natural to me, and as if my childish dreams had been realized."

"I will not paint them in for the public eye, but just for your private gratification, Miss Saltoun. You shall have a suspicion of them in the film rising from the water or the silver-grayness of the moonlight on the leaves."

"Oh, that is just what I should have said!" exclaimed the girl, with clasped hands, "if I had not been afraid you would have thought me silly."

"Then I must think Shakespeare was silly when he word-painted Titania and Oberon for us. We cannot see fairies nowadays, but I daresay they are round about us all the same," said Geoffrey, with a light laugh.

He had put in the few strokes he needed to remind him of the Fairies' Glade by that time and expressed his readiness to proceed.

"This is a gloomy little place," said Rachel as they halted by a small, dark pool, the surface of which was covered with white water-lilies, "but I love it all the same. I used to sit here, after my poor mother's death and gaze at the water, till they thought I was going to commit suicide, and sent me straight off to a school at Brussels."

"But you never could do that, surely, under any circumstances," said Geoffrey.

"I don't know. Why shouldn't one. It is only going to sleep a few hours sooner than usual, after all."

"I don't think so, happily. But if it were, what laziness or cowardice to go to sleep before the day's work is done."

"But I haven't any work to do. I have only to spend money and enjoy myself; and I do get so sick of it sometimes."

"We all have work to do, Miss Saltoun; but some of us refuse to recognize it. Your money alone must give you work to do. It was never intended for your sole gratification."

"I try to scatter it," said Rachel, coloring; "but I always seem to be doing more harm than good. If you have finished 'Ophelia's Pool,' Mr. Salter, we will pass on to something brighter and livelier."

She took the young artist after that to one spot after another, until the eight sketches had been roughly transferred to his note-book. To some he objected as not being suitable for the purpose, and others were too extensive or too commonplace. But, on the whole, he managed to satisfy her; and they spent a pleasant afternoon to-

gether out in the gorgeous sunshine, and under the fragrant shade, talking of art and its requirements, and the fourfold return which it made its worshippers. And Miss Saltoun ventured, after a little while, to broach to him the subject which was just then nearest her heart, and ask if he permitted any one to watch him whilst at work.

Mr. Salter laughed.

"I don't care about it, Miss Saltoun, I tell you frankly; but I don't see how I could well request you to leave your own grounds if you had a fancy for watching me."

"But, Mr. Salter, you cannot think I would take advantage of Catherstone being mine to annoy you in any way. I should have no right to do so, even if I felt inclined. But it would be such infinite pleasure to me, as well as profit, if I might sit by you whilst you work, and watch your method."

"Take surreptitious lessons of me, in fact," replied the artist smiling.

"Oh, no, no! What am I asking you? How mean you must think me!" exclaimed Rachel, with visible distress. "I remember now you said distinctly you had no time for pupils, and my proposal must have seemed just what you say. Do forgive me. You have made me feel quite ashamed of myself——"

Geoffrey looked up into her face as she spoke, and wondered how he could ever have thought her plain. Now that her eyes were glowing with earnestness, and her delicate mouth trembling with sensibility, no one would have noticed her nose was not a Grecian, nor her complexion like roses. She looked almost beautiful in her distress and shame, and Geoffrey hastened to relieve her of them.

"Please don't so misunderstand me," he answered. "I was only laughing a little bit at your sly way of working, and have to apologize for the liberty of doing so. Of course I shall be only too pleased to help you in any possible way I can. What you want is, to be able to sit by me and paint as I paint—is it not? Well, so you shall. We will erect our easels side by side, and if I can improve your style I will gladly do so. You have not shown me any of your own drawings yet; so I really

don't know if I have a tyro or a mistress of her art to contend with."

"Oh, no mistress, Mr. Salter, but only an ardent lover. I have never really cared for anything but painting; and it is very good of you to consent to help. You—you wouldn't take me as a regular pupil I suppose?" said Rachel timidly, thinking she shouldn't accept his offer without some remuneration.

"No," he replied shortly. "I cannot. I told Mrs. Ommaney so in my studio. What I may be able to do for you, Miss Saltoun, must be done as—as—not as a friend, of course, but in a friendly way. You understand me, don't you?"

"Not exactly. Why not as a friend?"

"Because we stand on different planes of life. You are the employer—I the employed; and I make it a rule never to forget that in the houses of my patrons. We meet on a purely mercantile basis, and that precludes friendship."

"Oh, Mr. Salter, you are hard upon your art. Surely that has the power to raise a man above kings?"

"In an intellectual sense—yes; not in a social one."

"You must banish such thoughts when you come to Catherstone. I should like it to be the Temple of Art, and it would contain no more ardent worshipper than myself."

"I never banish them, Miss Saltoun, and I can perfectly distinguish between my art and myself. By the way, you must congratulate me, I have sold 'The Awakening of the Soul'—"

"Indeed," said Rachel, reddening. "And to whom?"

"I do not know yet. I received the news by telegram this morning, and could not make out the name of the purchaser; but it's paid for, so it's all right."

"Aren't you sorry to part with it, Mr. Salter?"

He sighed.

"A little, but should have been sorry to keep it. I work for my living, and it would not be much satisfaction for me to retain a picture gallery. I only hope, when it reaches its destination, that it will be hung in a good light."

"Then you must come and choose the situation for it yourself, Mr. Salter," replied Rachel, "for I am the proud possessor of 'The Awakening of the Soul.'"

"You?" he exclaimed, opening his eyes.

"Yes. I ascertained the price you had put on it from the Academy office, and sent the check yesterday. I am so glad I was in time this year. I have dreamt of that picture ever since I saw it in your studio. It is a life lesson. How I wish *my* soul would awake like that to a complete and unextinguishable belief. Perhaps, by looking at it daily, it may. I think I had something of that sort in my mind when I determined to purchase it."

"You have a great deal more in your mind, Miss Saltoun, than most people give you credit for," said the young man still looking at her; and then, fearing lest her pride should take offence at his outspokenness, he added quickly, "but that is not *my* business. All I have to do is to thank you for your generosity, and to trust you may never have reason to regret your purchase."

"Oh, I sha'n't do that!" exclaimed Rachel, lightly, as a footman approached her from the house.

"If you please, madam, his Grace the Duke of Craig-Morris is in the library, and wishes to see you."

"Good heavens!" cried Miss Saltoun. "Here's my grand-dad. What on earth can the old man want with me? How long has his Grace been here, James?"

"Better than an hour, madam. Mrs. Cranley has been entertaining him since his arrival."

"All right. Go back and say I'm coming. Really Mrs. Cranley is invaluable. Miss Montrie would have sent that man after me at once. Will you come in, Mr. Salter, and be introduced to my grandfather?"

"Just as you like, Miss Saltoun. But if the old gentleman has come down to see you, I shall probably be in the way."

Rachel paused. This "artist fellow," as his Grace would probably have termed him, did not appear to be in the least overcome at the prospect of meeting a duke. And perhaps the duke might say something to annoy him. Dukes and duchesses have not always paid "the extra twopence for

manners." And Miss Saltoun would have been sorry for anything to interfere just then with the satisfactory arrangements they had arrived at. She replied,—

"He's one of the most horrible old men in the world, Mr. Salter. I don't mind confiding to you so far, and seldom honors Catherstone, unless he has a rod in pickle for me. So, if you don't want to hear me scolded, perhaps it would be wiser if we said good-bye at once."

"I am sure it would," said Geoffrey; "for if the old gentleman were to say anything rude to me, I'm afraid he would get as good as he gave, and then, what would become of my commissions?"

They both laughed merrily at this sally, after the fashion of young people, and Miss Saltoun actually held out her hand at parting.

But as she walked slowly into her grandfather's presence, she could not help wondering who this man was, who seemed so utterly indifferent to an introduction to a duke, and spoke of him in such very familiar terms.

"He doesn't seem to consider that grand-dad is a bit better than himself. I am afraid he's a terrible Radical," said Rachel, thoughtfully.

CHAPTER IX.

" HIS GRACE."

No one unacquainted with the fact would have recognized the Duke of Craig-Morris for a nobleman. He was a tall, gaunt Scotchman, now somewhat stooping from the weight of years, with grizzled sandy hair, high cheek bones, small piercing blue eyes, and a tremendous nose. But it was his dress that puzzled a stranger. The Saltoun family were not rich—the bulk of Rachel's fortune had come to her through her mother—and the Duke of Craig-Morris was also very stingy. His coat and trousers would have been rejected by many a poor man; his boots were patched all over; his Inverness cape, which he wore at all seasons, was greasy with age; and his hat would not have fetched a shilling from a second-hand dealer.

The Duke having lost his Duchess by death, and put all his sons out into the world, had long since let his Scottish estates, till such time as they should fall into the hands of Lord Alberty, his son and heir, and taken up his residence at his club chambers in Pall Mall, where he was as familiar an object as the Palace of St. James'.

He seldom troubled his grand-daughter with a visit. When he did, it was generally (as she had said) to find some fault with her, for Rachel was not a favorite with her father's family, notwithstanding she was so proud of the connection. The fact is they were jealous of her good fortune; they were all poor for their station in life, and she was rich—that was the secret of their coolness. They thought her father, Lord Edgar, might have done something for them instead of leaving everything to her, and they grumbled at each bit of extravagance of which she was guilty, as if it had been paid for out of their purses.

The Duke had heard of the purchase of the Academy

picture ; that was why he had come down to Catherstone without any previous notice.

As soon as Kate Cranley heard he was in the library she rushed down to meet him.

She was very anxious to ingratiate herself with Rachel's grand relations, and she had met the Duke of Craig-Morris before. She looked her very best as she came forward with a deep reverence to receive him, in his greasy old Inverness cape and patched boots.

"Miss Saltoun is in the grounds, your Grace," she said as she regained her equilibrium ; "I will send out at once, and let her know that your Grace is here."

"No hurry, my dear, no hurry," replied the old man, who, from being so often mistaken for a begging letter-writer, liked to be addressed with all his honors ; "I intend to stay to dinner. And who may you be ?"

"I am Miss Saltoun's companion, your Grace. Doubtless you do not recollect me, but I have had the honor of meeting your Grace before. You were a kind friend to my late father, the Reverend James Aubyn."

"God bless my soul !" cried the Duke, adjusting his glasses. "Are you old Jim Aubyn's daughter ? Why, of course, I remember him ; the hardest drinker and swearer of his cloth that I ever knew. And so you are Ray's companion ? Well, I daresay you might have done worse ; she's a wilful, extravagant puss, but she should be able to pay you a good salary. What d'ye get ?"

This question, which would have been deemed a signal impertinence from a commoner, was naturally a great compliment from a duke.

"Oh ! your Grace, more than I am worth, I am sure," replied Kate, with affected modesty. "Miss Saltoun is good enough to give me two hundred a year !"

"And I daresay you do a lot of dirty work in return for it ! Carry her love-letters, and smuggle her young men into the house, eh, Miss Aubyn ?"

"My name is no longer Miss Aubyn, your Grace ! I am Mrs. Cranley !"

"What ! married ? A fine young woman like you ? It's a thousand pities. Where's your husband ?"

"He is dead, your Grace."

"Ah! good job; you're a great deal too pretty to be tied to anybody. And I hope, now you are here, that you will try and restrain my grand-daughter in some of her extravagances. The girl throws away her money like water. It's perfectly wicked. Now I hear that she has bought some big Academy picture for two thousand pounds. Where is she going to put it? Hasn't she pictures enough already? The walls are covered with them. It's ridiculous," said the Duke, as he paced up and down the room impatiently.

"I suppose your Grace alludes to Mr. Geoffrey Salter's picture of 'The Awakening of the Soul,'" replied Kate Cranley. "Miss Saltoun is in the grounds with him at the present moment."

The Duke stopped short and regarded her.

"The man is down here? Do you mean to say that Rachel has invited him to Catherstone?"

"He is coming to stay here in a little while," replied the companion. "Miss Saltoun has engaged him to paint the drawing-room panels, and she informed me they would occupy him for two months!"

"And this artist fellow is to stay at Catherstone for two months?"

"Miss Saltoun said so, your Grace!"

"With you two young woman?"

"I have heard nothing to the contrary."

"Oh! it's scandalous—unprecedented—unheard of! It must not be," exclaimed his Grace of Craig-Morris. "Why, she'll be marrying the fellow, or something of the sort! That'll be the end of it. What is he like? Young?"

"Quite young, your Grace."

"And good-looking?"

"I suppose most people would consider him so."

"Now, look here, Mrs. Cranley," said the Duke, coming close to her side; "your father was a deuced sharp old fellow, and I expect you know how many beans make five yourself. Miss Montrie was no good here at all. If I told her anything, she blabbed it to Ray directly my back was

turned, but you're another sort. I expect you can keep your own counsel, and I'm going to confide in you."

"Whatever confidence your Grace may honor me with shall be held sacred. You may depend upon that," replied Kate, gravely.

"My grand-daughter is a fool—a hot-headed, romantic, impulsive fool—and as obstinate as a mule. She prides herself on her reserve and her exclusiveness, but it's all talk. She's just the sort of girl to make a *mésalliance* for the pleasure of defying the world, and she has, unfortunately the means to do it. Her poor father was insane enough to leave her her own mistress, and she has gone ahead in her own style ever since. Her family have no control over her; but a woman like yourself, living under the same roof, could do much to help us. Will you?"

Mrs. Cranley deliberated a moment. Would this old man make it worth her while to break with her employer? She thought not. At the same time, if she offended the Duke he might set Miss Saltoun against her. So she temporized by saying:

"Your Grace would not ask me to offend Miss Saltoun, who has been very good to me?"

"Offend? Pooh! Nonsense! No; of course not. If you offended her, you would be of no use to me. I want you to keep in with her all you can; but keep your eyes open, Mrs. Cranley, and let me know what's going on. If this artist fellow (or any other fellow) comes loafing round the place, let me know of it. You can always come to my little rooms, you know—620 Pall Mall—and I'll make it worth your while, my dear, you may depend on that."

"Oh, your Grace, I would do it gladly, only to oblige you."

"No, you wouldn't. Girls in your position want new bonnets and gloves, and scores of things that they cannot afford to buy. But if you will keep my grand-daughter out of scrapes, I will see that you can afford them."

"But if Miss Saltoun insists upon entertaining this gentleman herself, I have no power to restrain her, your Grace."

"Catch him on the sly, my dear, and make love to him yourself; cut Rachel out; you're a much handsomer woman than she is, and got twice her cleverness. You'd turn a man's thoughts your way fast enough if you'd a mind to it. By Jove! I wish I was twenty years younger myself, when I look at you."

Kate Cranley colored, and twisted herself about under the fire of these ducal compliments, and began to wonder if the old man really meant what he said, and if there was any chance of her wearing a coronet.

"Your Grace may depend on me. I will do my utmost," she said presently.

"That's right. You see we don't want Ray to marry yet. We think she is too young to make a sensible choice. And when she does marry, it must be into a family equal to ours. And she is very prejudiced, and very averse to any counsel but her own."

"But very proud, your Grace. Miss Saltoun's pride will, I feel sure, prevent her ever making a marriage beneath her. Why, she refused Lord Vivian, because his great-grandfather had been in trade. She told me so herself."

"That may be, my dear, and to-morrow she may swear her baker is a nobleman in disguise. You never know where to take these self-determined young women. But what can she be doing all this time with that artist?"

"I believe she is pointing out the places she wishes him to sketch, your Grace. Shall I send someone to tell her you are here?"

"Yes, I think it is time the *tête-a-tête* was broken up. And don't forget what I have told you, Mrs. Cranley. Balk her flirtations as much as you possibly can, and let me know all that goes on at Catherstone; and I'll make it worth your while."

Mrs. Cranley gave the required promise, and when Rachel entered the library, a few minutes later, she found her noble grandfather standing on the rug, and her companion industriously engaged with the afternoon tea-tray at the other end of the library.

"How are you grand-dad?" she said, carelessly, as she presented her cheek for a salute.

"Pretty well! my dear. But I won't deny that I've been annoyed this morning—very much annoyed. Colonel Behrend told me you had purchased an Academy picture for two thousand pounds. I couldn't believe it till I went over to the office and inquired. I don't consider you have any right to make such an important purchase, Rachel, without consulting your family. You seem to forget that, if you die unmarried, your money goes to the children of your mother's brother, Sir Henry Mordaunt."

"Well! that is no concern of the Saltouns'."

"But the house in Portland Place will be your uncle Arthur's."

"What has all this to do with my buying Mr. Salter's picture? Are we at the reading of a will, grandfather?"

"My dear! you waste your money. You spend it recklessly—extravagantly. It is an injustice to those who come after you. What on earth can you want with more paintings?"

"That is not the question, grand-dad! and I don't suppose you would understand if I were to tell you. I love art, and you despise it. I would rather possess that picture than anything in the world, and you would rather have a good dinner than the picture. All value is relative, you see. But there can be no dispute about one thing—that I have a right to spend my own money as I choose."

"I don't acknowledge the right," replied the Duke.

"My father did so," rejoined Rachel, hotly.

"Your father was a—I mean, your father was greatly mistaken. He supposed, of course, that a young woman would be guided by the opinion of her relations; he left you your own mistress, it is true, but he never dreamed that you would fill Catherstone with your inferiors in the social scale."

"What do you mean by that?" cried Rachel, flashing round upon him.

"Why I hear from Mrs. Cranley that you have engaged this man Salter to do work in the house that will occupy him for two months."

"His Grace asked me the question, dear Miss Saltoun," interposed Mrs. Cranley, deprecatingly, "and I was obliged to answer it."

"Of course. Why shouldn't you? I do nothing that I am ashamed of. Mr. Salter has agreed to do the work, and it will take two months. What of that?"

"And where will this—this—artist live during the performance of his duty?" inquired her grandfather.

"At Catherstone, naturally."

"What, in the house?"

"Of course, in the house. You don't expect me to put him in the stables do you?"

"Well, I call it most improper!" exclaimed the Duke. "A low-born fellow like that, shut up alone for two months with an unmarried girl."

"I shall not be alone. Mrs. Cranley is here on purpose to *chaperon* me. And how do you know this gentleman is low born?"

"*Gentleman!* Faugh—an artist! Everyone knows they are the scum of the earth; and you, the Honorable Rachel Saltoun, my grand-daughter, are actually going to demean yourself like this. Bah! I'm ashamed of you!"

Rachel flared up like a house on fire.

"Look here, grand-dad," she cried; "don't begin to bandy words with me, or I may remind you of some things, that might well make me ashamed of you."

"My dear, dear, Miss Saltoun," exclaimed Mrs. Cranley horror-struck at hearing such language addressed to a Duke.

"Don't interrupt me, Mrs. Cranley; I will say what I choose; I won't stand such things even from my grandfather. I have never disgraced you or your family, sir. No one is prouder of the name than myself, nor done less to lower it; but this is my affair, and I shall act in it as I think right. Mr. Salter comes to my house as a gentleman, and he shall be treated as such. He will be with us, Mrs. Cranley, on the twenty-sixth, and you will see that everything is prepared for his reception."

"I wash my hands of you—I wash my hands of you!" reiterated the Duke, frowningly, as he commenced to re-invest himself with the order of the greasy Inverness.

"I really wish you'd wash your clothes at the same time, grand-dad," remarked Miss Saltoun, saucily. "Talk of disgracing the family! I'm sure that Inverness cape of yours is enough to disgrace all humanity!"

The Duke of Craig-Morris made no answer to this remark, except such as was conveyed by the slam of the library-door as it closed behind him.

"Oh, my dear Miss Saltoun, I'm afraid you have offended his Grace sadly," said Mrs. Cranley, "for I know he intended to stay to dinner."

"I am very glad he didn't," replied Rachel; "we've had quite enough of him for one day! Fancy! his presuming to dictate how I shall spend my money, and when it all came from my dear mother. Disagreeable old man! I'm so glad he's gone! And only fancy, Mrs. Cranley, Mr. Salter has made the most charming sketches for my panels, and he has promised to let me work with him, and he is to be here on the twenty-sixth. So mind that the rose suite is ready for him. I shouldn't have dreamt of putting a bachelor into those lovely rooms, but I am determined to do it now, in hopes his Grace may hear of it."

And Mrs. Cranley determined that his Grace should.

CHAPTER X.

THE ARTIST'S REFUSAL.

THE rose suite of Catherstone consisted of a bedroom, dressing-room, bath and boudoir, and were the best guest chambers in the house. They were upholstered in pink and white, and pre-eminently unsuitable for the occupation of a man. The hangings were of rose-colored damask, the mirror was framed in ivory, the china was of a pale cream tint, and the walls were covered with the flower from which the suite took its name.

No bachelor, not even the Duke of Craig-Morris himself, had ever been invited to inhabit them, and now Miss Saltoun had decided they were to be given up to an artist.

It was just like her. She had done it out of bravado, and because her grandfather had presumed to question her rights as a hostess.

Mrs. Cranley showed her surprise at the arrangement as much as she dared, but she was not bold enough to remonstrate with her employer, in which she showed her wisdom.

"Mr. Salter ought to consider himself highly flattered," she averred. "I do not suppose he had ever *seen* such rooms in his life before. He will hardly know how to behave in them."

"Why not?" inquired Rachel. "He has been used to associate with ladies and gentlemen. He stayed at Thorley Castle whilst he was employed by the Duke of Cressy, and Catherstone cannot hold a candle (in point of magnificence) to Thorley."

"But I don't suppose he occupied the best rooms in the Castle," said Kate Cranley.

"Perhaps not. But he will occupy the best rooms at Catherstone, and you will see that they are properly prepared for him," replied Miss Saltoun, in a tone of voice that admitted of no further argument.

She was eagerly expectant of the young man's arrival, purely (let it be said) for her art's sake, and the pleasure that she took in his. If Rachel Saltoun cherished any other feeling in her breast with regard to Geoffrey Salter at this period, it was quite unconsciously. She admired him for his genius, and was anxious to secure his co-operation, and have him as a "lion" at her parties for that reason only. If, sometimes, a remembrance of his serious and beautiful eyes flashed across her mind, she attributed it solely to the interest which any unusual talent provoked in her.

Mr. Salter had written to say he would commence to work on her commission the middle of July, and secretly she became quite excited at the near prospect of his arrival.

"Now," she thought to herself, "he will have to appear at my *salons*, whether he likes it or not. It would be impossible for him to refuse to come downstairs when he is staying in the house. And it will do him good. It is absurd for so young a man to be such an anchorite; with his appearance and his talent, he might become the rage, if he chose to do so.

She worked a great deal at her painting in those days in preparation for the lessons she was to receive from him, and she often visited her favorite spots in the park to see if they continued in full beauty for transference to the canvas.

At last the day arrived which had been fixed for the commencement of the work, and at twelve o'clock in the forenoon Geoffrey Salter punctually presented himself at Catherstone.

He was clothed in a simple knickerbocker suit of heather-tweed, but he looked every inch a gentleman in Miss Saltoun's eyes as he advanced, with a glowing, animated face, to meet her.

"I am so glad you have come!" she exclaimed, with far more cordiality than she was accustomed to use with her acquaintance. But where is your luggage, Mr. Salter?"

"My luggage?" he echoed. "It's hardly worth

designating by such a title. I have only a portmanteau with me. I left it at the Roehampton Arms."

"Oh, why did you do that? I will send for it at once. Your rooms are all ready for you," said Rachel, as she moved towards the bell.

But he interposed to prevent her action.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Saltoun, but pray don't ring. It is all right. I have engaged my rooms at the Roehampton Arms."

She turned, with her hand on the bell, and regarded him.

"You have secured rooms at the inn. You mean you are not going to stay at Catherstone?"

"To stay at Catherstone? You are very good, but I never dreamt of such a thing. I couldn't think of putting you to the inconvenience."

"It is no inconvenience. How could it be? And you stayed at Thorley Castle?"

"Yes. But that was different. The Duke was there."

Directly he had said the words, he saw by the look of proud haughtiness that came over Miss Saltoun's face, that he had made a great mistake. It was as though she dared him to explain what difference a man's presence could make to the relations that existed between herself and him. She removed her hand from the bell, and walked some little distance apart.

"Just as you please, Mr. Salter," she replied, coldly; "the rooms are empty, and I thought you might just as well occupy them. But if you will be as comfortable at the Roehampton Arms, it will be a pity to make a change. I conclude you will take your meals with us."

"No, thank you very much, but I have also arranged to take my meals there," stammered Geoffrey. "You see, Miss Saltoun," he added, more lightly, "I never like to give my patrons (and especially when they are ladies) more trouble than I can possibly avoid. Besides, when one has to utilize every moment of light, it is not always convenient to be regular at meals. I shall feel freer, and I shall do your work better, if I am independent of your household arrangements."

"Just as you please," she repeated, "in the same tone. She could not forgive his allusion to the Duke of Cressy's presence in Thorley Castle. It was as though he would have said: "There I was safe. With *you*, I might not be.

Of course Geoffrey Salter was perfectly innocent of any such idea, but that made no difference, since she thought otherwise. A painful silence ensued between them which was broken by Geoffrey himself.

"Shall I go to work, Miss Saltoun?" he inquired, "or rather, shall *we* go to work? It will not do to waste one minute of such a typical summer's day."

"You are your own master here, Mr. Salter, and can do just as you choose," she answered; "but I am afraid I am not much in the humor for painting this morning, added to which I have an engagement elsewhere."

"All right, then; I will begin without you," he replied, cheerfully—a cheerfulness which was another black mark against him in her book; "and if you will kindly intimate in which panel you would like to see the Fairies' Glade, I will commence to sketch it in at once."

"Choose your own panel, Mr. Salter," she said. "I leave the entire business in your hands. I think you know your way to the drawing-room, and if there is anything missing there which you may require, you have but to ring the bell and the servants will attend to you."

She bowed, as if to dismiss him from her presence, as she spoke, and he bowed in response and left the room, feeling he had lost ground with her, but hardly conscious why. But the fact is, she was terribly annoyed at the rebuff which he had dared to give her. Instead of jumping at the idea of staying as a guest at Catherstone, he had actually dared to insinuate (if not to say) that under existing circumstances, he could not do so. That his presence—the presence of an artist—a genius, it was true, but of unknown origin—under the same roof as herself, might be detrimental to her, the Honorable Rachel Saltoun, the grand-daughter of the Duke of Craig-Morris—that it was advisable, in fact, that they should have some *chaperon*, like the Duke himself, before they indulged in the familiarity of a daily intercourse.

What did the man mean? He spoke as if he had been some young lord or hero, some equal to whom she might ally herself, with whom an unchecked intimacy might prove dangerous.

Rachel was in such a rage that she betrayed herself,—a circumstance so unusual with her that it proved that she was for once off her balance. She rang the bell and summoned Kate Cranley.

"Mrs. Cranley," she commenced, "Mr. Salter has arrived, but he will not stay at Catherstone. He had already made other arrangements for himself. Let the housekeeper know that the rooms will not be occupied."

Mrs. Cranley lifted her hands with surprise.

"Not going to stay here? My dear Miss Saltoun, did he understand the rooms had been prepared for him?"

"Whether he did or not, he will stay at the Roehampton Arms whilst with us. I begin to think my grand-dad was right, and it was not quite the thing for me to ask him here. Neither will he take his meals at Catherstone. I presume he makes provision for all such extras when he names his prices. And he seems to keep very irregular hours, so it is just as well we should be independent of one another. Will you order the open carriage for half-past two? I am going to drive to Streatham to see Lady Walter Somers; she has a garden-party this afternoon."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed the companion. "Then you have given up the idea of sketching with Mr. Salter, I suppose? I thought you were going to do a duplicate set of panels to hang in your bedroom."

"Will you be kind enough, Mrs. Cranley," said Rachel, "to confine your attention to your own business. I have not altered any of my intentions that I am aware of. But I am going to drive to Streatham this afternoon, and I wish you to accompany me."

Upon which Kate Cranley said no more; but she seized an early opportunity to go into the drawing-room and see the young artist at his work. There he was, balanced on the top of a step-ladder, sketching in his subjects with black chalk, his stockinged legs and laced boots striking

this connoisseur in manly attractions as being especially neat and comely.

"Can I fetch you anything, Mr. Salter?" she inquired meekly. "Have you all that you require?"

"Everything, Mrs. Cranley, thank you," replied Geoffrey, greeting her with a slight obeisance. "You will forgive my not descending from this eminence, won't you? A workman is bound to consider his employer's time."

"Oh, don't mention it. I have been used to business men all my life. But we thought you would have saved so much time by staying in the house, Mr. Salter."

"Did you? It was a chimera. The inn is not ten minutes' walk from here; and I never eat between breakfast and dinner."

"But your rooms were prepared for you a week ago. The best suite in the house too. Miss Saltoun is very much disappointed by your decision."

"Nonsense. What difference can it make to her? I shall not be a day longer over these panels for staying in Roehampton. Besides, I am a bit of a recluse, and prefer my own company."

"I am afraid you are not much alive to your interests, Mr. Salter."

"In what way?"

"It is not every man who would refuse the offer to stay for a couple of months beneath the same roof with a rich and single young lady."

"Well, you see I am *not* every man," replied Geoffrey, who did not like the turn the conversation had taken. "Forgive me, Mrs. Cranley, but I can't talk whilst I am sketching. It destroys my composition."

And with that he returned to his work, and Mrs. Cranley laughed and left the room. She did not fail, however, to remark that Miss Saltoun was more than usually silent and reserved during the drive that ensued. Her face wore a disappointed expression also as she leant back in the carriage, and gazed at the scenes which they passed through.

And Rachel *was* disappointed. She had meant to be so kind, and her kindness had been thrown back in her face.

And yet it could hardly be possible that the artist had any objection to be a guest at Catherstone, or that he could really imagine that his temporary residence there would be productive of any unpleasantness for herself. That would be too ridiculous. Anyway, his refusal had offended her, and, for awhile, she resolved never to extend any but the barest courtesy to him again.

But with the morning came another frame of mind. After all, she thought, she was about to lay herself under a certain obligation to him by accepting his professional advice, and it would be better to forget the excuse he had given for refusing her invitation, and lay it to his ignorance, or want of etiquette.

She sought the drawing-room (which was now turned into a studio), therefore, as soon as breakfast was concluded, and found Mr. Salter already hard at work.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, drawing a long breath, as she came in sight of the panel, which was already having the first colors laid on. How bold and masterly was its execution; how broad its breadth; how deep its depth. The Fairies Glade seemed to be starting into a second life beneath his magic brush.

"Good-morning, Miss Saltoun," said Geoffrey. "Do you begin to recognize your favorite spot?"

"I should think I did. You have caught its expression (if I may use the term) to the very life."

"I am glad you like it, but as you can see, this is but the rough design. I waited till you should come, to go into the park and jot down the tints for Ophelia's Pool. This, I think, we decided was to be taken by moonlight. It will be full-moon to-night, and the very opportunity for my purpose."

"Oh! not to-night, Mr. Salter," exclaimed Rachel, forgetting her resolution.

"Why not, Miss Saltoun?" he asked, astonished by her earnestness.

"Because it is Tuesday—the night of my *salon*, you know—and I want to introduce you to my guests."

"I am afraid I must ask you to excuse me, Miss Saltoun. Evening parties are quite out of my element."

"How strange! Do you never go anywhere?"

"Very seldom, and never for pleasure. You know what I told you some time ago. We stand on different planes."

"What do you mean? You are a gentleman."

"At heart I trust I am. But your grand friends might not call me so. I don't think you would call me so if you knew exactly what my position in life is."

"I know that you are a genius, and that you will be one of the laurel-crowned," replied Rachel, impulsively.

"Thank you very much. Those words of yours give me more pleasure than I can tell you. Still my genius, as you are pleased to call it, cannot unmake my birth."

"I wish you would tell me—everything," said Rachel, as they walked together to Ophelia's Pool. "I think your diffidence must exaggerate the matter. I cannot believe that you have anything to be ashamed of."

"Neither have I," responded Geoffrey, quickly. "I honor my own people above all the nobility of England. I only said that you and I have been born to occupy different stations in life, and I am too proud to thrust my company where I may meet with a rebuff for my supposed presumption."

"You ought to know that you would never meet with a rebuff in my house," said Rachel. "You would be my guest, and *noblesse oblige*. But tell me, what is the obstacle to our being friends?"

"My father is in trade, Miss Saltoun. My family are all in trade. That is the obstacle."

Her voice was just a trifle less reliant as she asked:

"What sort of trade?"

"He is a hosier. He has had a shop in the city for years. My mother and sisters live on the premises. My brother is in the business. I should be there too, in all probability, were it not for my gift of painting. This is why I stick to my business, and do not care to mix in society. No one shall ever have it in his power to reproach me with having thrust myself upon him on false pretences. And now you know *everything*," concluded Geoffrey Salter, as he threw his head loftily into the air, and walked on beside her.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRE.

PERHAPS it is too much to say that Geoffrey Salter's confession was a shock to Rachel Saltoun, but it certainly threw a considerable amount of cold water on the romance she had commenced to weave concerning him.

For a few moments she did not answer, and when she did, she affected an indifference which she did not feel.

"Well!" she exclaimed, "and what of it? What difference can it make to our acquaintance? You are a genius and a gentleman—I have no hesitation in saying so——"

"Thank you," interpolated the artist, rather sarcastically.

"And I should think that the grand-daughter of the Duke of Craig-Morris might do as she choose in such matters, and select her friends for herself."

"But I don't choose to be so selected, Miss Saltoun. You want to make a 'lion' of me, just because I have painted a successful picture. And had it not been successful, what then?"

"But half our native talent has risen because of itself, Mr. Salter."

"Do you call it 'rising,' to be admitted on sufferance to a circle above that to which your birth entitles you? I would as soon be exhibited in a cage at the Zoological Gardens. Beside which, I am presumptuous enough (or you would call it presumption) to consider that I am on a perfect equality with the majority of your guests, and a good deal above some of them."

"You mean your talent places you in that position. In that, I agree with you. I have already told you that, in my opinion, it raises a man above kings."

"I was not alluding to my talent at all, Miss Saltoun.

I was thinking of my unsullied blood, and the untarnished reputation of my family. Ah, that makes you stare. But if I speak at all, you must be prepared to hear such sentiments. I have already told you that I am a regular Radical."

"Go on speaking," said Rachel, in reply. "If I cannot, agree with your opinions, at least it interests me to hear them."

"Shall I tell you, then, why I think so? My family has been in trade for the last two hundred years. We can trace up our pedigree, perhaps, as far as your own; but we take no pride in things for which we can claim no merit. What we *are* proud of, Miss Saltoun, is, that as far as we can trace back, no member of our family has ever been bankrupt, nor in jail, nor in the divorce court. But, I suppose, those are obsolete virtues nowadays, and have lost their value."

"No, don't say that, Mr. Salter," said Rachel; "don't imagine that it is impossible to be both well-born and respectable."

"Heaven forbid!" cried Geoffrey. "Are *you* not walking beside me at the present moment? But when I see the old men and women of your (so called) good society, who are insolent only because it is in their power to patronize, when I see the young ones (the 'mashers,' as they are slangily termed), with their effete manners, their undermined constitutions, their dissipated lives, and their useless days of folly, I thank God that I come of a race who have transmitted to me uncontaminated blood, well-knit muscles, and a wholesome detestation of all that is impure, unchristian, and untrue."

"Have you many brothers and sisters, Mr. Salter?" asked Miss Saltoun, without remarking on this diatribe.

"I have three brothers and two sisters. My eldest brother, Will, is a civil engineer in Canton. From a child he cared for nothing but disintegrating and reconstructing various engines and machines, and as soon as he was old enough, he qualified, and passed as an engineer. Hal is farming in Manitoba, and doing very well; and Jack, who is the youngest of the four, is at home, and

supposed to help my father in the business, but he doesn't take to it very kindly. I suppose no man would who found anything better to do," said Geoffrey with a short laugh.

"And your sisters?" continued Rachel interrogatively, and as if she felt an interest in the narrative.

"My sisters are two very pretty girls," replied Geoffrey; "or, at least, so the young men seem to think. Emmeline is twenty, and Helen eighteen. Don't think me impertinent, Miss Saltoun, when I say, that you remind me of my sister Nelly. She has the same *spirituelle* look, and the same smile; only she smiles much oftener than you do. She is the merriest member of the family."

"And—and do your sisters help—I mean do they—" commenced Rachel, hesitatingly.

The young man laughed at her confusion.

"You mean, do they serve in the shop? Don't be afraid of hurting my feelings, Miss Saltoun. Remember the shop and I have grown up together, and I look upon it as a very honorable institution. No; Nelly never has done so. My father considers her far too frivolous and attractive for such a position. My mother used to superintend a good deal there, but she has not been very strong lately, and Emmy has taken her place. Emmy is prettier than Nelly, but she is much steadier. She has the head of an old woman."

"And they all live together happily?" said Rachel. "It must be very delightful to have brothers and sisters; I have always been alone."

"Oh! I think ours is about the happiest family in the world," replied Geoffrey, enthusiastically. "Of course, I would like to have my father and mother and sisters to live with me. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to make a home for them. But they won't come. They are too independent. That is why I continue to occupy the little cottage behind the studio, so that I may lay by money against the time when my parents are too old to make it for themselves. And that is all my insignificant history, Miss Saltoun. Why I should have troubled you with it, I cannot imagine. It is not often I talk so

much of myself, but you seem to have drawn it out of me, almost against my will. Please pardon the egotism."

"Oh, it is a grand, a noble history, Mr. Salter. How much you must love your father and mother, to speak of them like that."

"Who should we love and be grateful to if not our parents, Miss Saltoun. Mine have been the very best of parents to me. I should loathe and despise myself for an ingrate and a poltroon, if I could ever be ashamed of them, or unmindful of all the sacrifices they have made for me. I feel as if every shilling I earned belonged more to them than to myself."

"How did you first discover your talent, Mr. Salter?"

"Oh, I was scribbling from a baby. Then my father gave us all a liberal education, and as soon as I fell into a drawing-master's hands, he found out what I was made of; and I have been exceptionally fortunate since. No one is better aware of it than myself."

Rachel looked sideways at him, and sighed heavily. What a pity—what ten thousand pities it was, she thought, that he should have sprung from a stock of tradesmen.

She said nothing more to him about appearing in her *salon* that evening. She hardly knew if she would be acting fairly to her other guests by encouraging him to do so. He was a genius, true; and had a gentlemanly bearing, but—Rachel closed her eyes as she arrived at that *but*, and thought of the terrible truth which should follow it.

The morning lesson was very pleasant and profitable to her, nevertheless. Mr. Salter did a great deal more for her than he had undertaken, even to sitting idle beside her easel whilst he explained his reasons for using this color or obliterating that. He praised her drawing also, and encouraged her to increased effort, and without flattery made her feel happier, with regard to Art, than she had done for some time past.

He did not talk much, but what he said was just to the point. He did nothing for her, but he showed her exactly how to do it for herself, and made her feel the while that he was her master, in every sense of the word, and she his pupil, who had everything to learn.

Once during the morning, she looked up to him and said,—

"It seems impossible that you, who conceived and painted 'The Awakening of the Soul,' should be condescending to correct this paltry attempt of mine. You are wasting your precious time. *Anyone* would be good enough for me."

"Is that so?" he answered, smiling. "How unkind of you to say it. We are getting on so nicely that I was just flattering myself that no one else would have done so well. But I will go to work too, now, and then you won't be able to say I am wasting my time. You have caught the light upon the other side of that pool remarkably well, Miss Saltoun. You know more than you give yourself credit for. I shall have to come to you for some lessons by-and-bye."

And laughing merrily at the idea, twenty-three and twenty-seven sat down side by side, painting the same subject, and quite forgot for the time being that one was the granddaughter of the Duke of Craig-Morris, and the other the son of a hosier.

"Gracious!" cried Rachel, looking at her watch, "it is three o'clock, and poor Mrs. Cranley must have been waiting luncheon for an hour. I must really go, Mr. Salter."

And she commenced to pack up her canvas and easel as she spoke.

"Allow me," said Geoffrey Salter, taking them from her hand. "Go to your luncheon, Miss Saltoun. I will take your easel to the house with my own."

"I don't like to let you," she replied deprecatingly.

"Am I not good enough to carry your easel and canvas?" he inquired.

"Oh, Mr. Salter, you know it is not that. I am honored by your offer. Well, then, I am a woman, and so I will let you do it. But only because I am a woman, mind."

"And if you were not a woman, I should never have offered," he said, as he looked up into her face. His hand had inadvertently touched hers as he took the drawing

materials from her, and Rachel's hand had fluttered at the contact. This made her angry—both with herself and him. She turned away almost abruptly, and, with a curt "Thank you," walked back to the house.

"What a proud soul," he thought, as he looked after her. "How proud, and yet how genuine. She fights for the prejudices in which she has been reared—so do I. And yet, strip us of our surroundings, make her the hosier's daughter, and I the Duke's grandson, and how much real difference would there be between us? None, unless the balance should be on her side for pure blood and a vigorous constitution. But she is a grand girl. She acts up to her lights, and so do I to mine. The pity is—ah, well! there's no pity at all about it," and Geoffrey Salter set to whistling vigorously over his work.

Meanwhile, Rachel was sauntering back to the house with no visible increase of rapidity, because Kate Cranley was waiting for her luncheon.

Kate Cranley was her companion. It was part of her business to wait. So thought the owner of Catherstone. And when she reached the luncheon-table, it seemed as though she might just as well have stayed away, for her appetite was conspicuous only by its absence.

"Why, what's the matter?" exclaimed Mrs. Cranley, who sometimes went further in her inquisitiveness than her employer cared for. "Can't you eat? This is a delicious curry, Miss Saltoun, simply perfect. Do try a little. Don't forget the fatiguing duties you have before you this evening."

"I do not forget them, but I am not hungry."

"And after having been all the morning in the open air. This will never do. I am afraid Mr. Salter must have been saying something to destroy your appetite."

Rachel looked as if she could have crushed her.

"What do you mean? What can Mr. Salter have to do with any caprice of mine? You forget yourself, Mrs. Cranley. Have you, at the same time, forgotten anything for this evening? Are the fairy lamps trimmed? and has the gardener received your orders for the decoration flowers?"

"Yes, dear Miss Saltoun, everything is ready, and I think the housekeeper has surpassed herself in the supper. Am I to order the carriage for this afternoon?"

"No, thank you, unless you wish to drive by yourself. I have a headache, and am going to my own room. I think the sun was a little too strong for me this morning."

"Yes, in the darkest part of the park," thought Kate Cranley, as Rachel left the room. "So likely. I watched them go in four hours ago. They must have had a good deal to say to each other. I fancy the Duke should hear of this. But I must find out who Mr. Salter is first. He might be a prince in disguise, to look at him. Or he may be a tailor's son. There is very little difference in them, after all, when they are properly dressed. She's smitten with him, or with his genius, I am sure of that. I never saw her so languid, or so little self-assertive before. Oh, love, you naughty boy, you level everything. I ought to know, for I've met you more than once; and if you're going to play your tricks on Geoffrey Salter, I shouldn't mind being Rachel Saltoun."

That evening's *salon* was marked by an unusual incident. His Grace of Craig-Morris put in an appearance. Rachel, robed in pale pink chiffon and pearls, was in the act of receiving her guests, when she saw her grandfather standing in the doorway. In a moment the truth flashed upon her that he had come to watch her actions. Her pride was aflame at once. She was only sorry for one thing—that Geoffrey Salter had not accepted her invitation to be present. How she would have hung upon his arm, and monopolized him for the entire evening. By this, it will be seen what an obstinate, contradictory spirit the Duke had to deal with. But what Rachel missed by Geoffrey's absence—the opportunity to thwart her grandfather's wishes—was provided for her in another direction.

The evening's enjoyment was at its height. The best singers had sung—the best elocutionists had recited, and the couples that had been flirting out on the terrace, had just reappeared with the announcement of supper, when

a horrible rumor of fire began to be circulated through the apartments.

"Fire!" cried Rachel, blanching at the idea of danger to her prized possessions; "where can there be fire?"

"In the stables, if you please, madam," whispered a footman. "It has broke out in the granary, Matthews has sent two men into Roehampton for the fire-engine, and the rest are doing what they can to keep down the flames."

"Oh, my horses! my ponies!" cried Rachel, wildly, for love of animals was a deeply implanted instinct with her, "What have they done with them? Are they all safe?"

"Matthews is doing his best, madam, but the doors are locked, and the fire's getting ahead."

Then she prepared to run out, just as she was, in her pink chiffon and pearls, to the rescue of her favorites.

"My dear! my dear!" interposed the Duke, trying to restrain her. "Remember where you are, and who you are; and leave this work to your servants."

"Leave my poor animals to burn to death whilst the fools stand by, and stare at them? I wont!" she said, vehemently, as she tore out of the house, followed by most of the gentlemen present.

The scene was an awful one. The fire had indeed got ahead of them. It roared and crackled, and flared above their heads, all the hay and straw being alight, and the glass of the stable windows already shattered in the yard. From inside might be heard the groans and snorts of the terrified horses, as they saw their doom drawing nearer; but with the exception of a few ineffectual kicks at the stable door, the assembled crowd had made no effort to release them.

"Where are the keys?" shouted Rachel, in her excitement.

"If you please, ma'am, the coachman has them in his pocket, and we don't know where he has gone."

"Burst in the doors then. Are you going to stand by and see my horses perish?"

The men applied their united force against the stout

stable doors, but with no visible effect. The flames, too, were bursting by this time through the open windows, and the stable-yard was filled with dense, black smoke.

"It would be as much as a man's life would be worth to break in them doors now," murmured a helper near her. "He'd be smothered in the smoke."

"Get a crowbar! Where are your spades and pick-axes?" cried Rachel. "Oh! if I had half your strength, I would be ashamed to stand by and do nothing."

"Stand back, Miss Saltoun, I implore you! you might catch alight yourself. Let me try and burst open the door!" exclaimed the voice of Geoffrey Salter, as falling several paces backwards, he girded up all his strength, and made one determined run against the now half-consumed panels.

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CHAPTER XII.

THE HERO OF THE EVENING.

THEY resisted his efforts the first time, but at the second assault they broke off their hinges, and fell backward into the stable, whilst the gentlemen present, who had been keeping as much as possible out of the way of the dirty water and the blackened stablemen, rewarded his success with a faint "Bravo?"

"Oh, thanks!—thanks!" cried Rachel, pressing forward. "But my horses. We must cut their halters. They know my voice, Mr. Salter. Let me go to them."

"No, no!" exclaimed Geoffrey, loudly. "Not you, for God's sake! They will know no one in their terror. Who has a clasp knife? That will do. Stand back, all of you. There will be a regular stampede. And now, who comes with me?"

Not a soul replied. The grooms knew the danger of entering a narrow stable filled with kicking, half-maddened animals, and groping their way through the dense smoke to their halter heads.

"Go, some of you," cried Rachel. "Cooper, you know the stables; the horses will be quiet if they hear your voice."

"Well, I don't know about that, ma'am," commenced the man unwillingly; "why, their very mangers are blazing. We can see the flames from here."

"Never mind, Miss Saltoun, I will do it for you," said Geoffrey, quickly. "Is there a vacant stall at this end?"

"Yes—yes! Climb over it into the mangers and cut the halters. Come, I will you show the way," and she rushed past him into the stable.

He was after her in a moment, and caught her by the dress.

"Go back, for Heaven's sake! I could do nothing with you here."

"Why not? I will help you."

"You cannot, in that flimsy dress. You will paralyze my nerves. I shall be thinking of nothing but you," he said rapidly as he pushed her from the stable door.

The smoke was blinding, but he fought his way through it, and reached the vacant stall. Vaulting into the manger, he climbed over the intervening partition, and managed to cut the halter of a magnificent chestnut (Rachel's riding horse), who was rearing with fright.

In another moment, finding himself free, the animal dashed out at the doorway, and tearing through the assembled crowd, scattered them right and left, as, followed by half-a dozen men, he galloped wildly into the adjoining garden.

"That is Adonis!" exclaimed Rachel exultantly, as the horse tore past her; "and here is Dorothy. Mr. Salter will save them all. Oh, how grand! how noble of him! He has done what not a single soul of you would attempt. I shall never forget it all my life."

The Duke of Craig-Morris, who was standing next her, heard the remark, and greatly disapproved of it. He could hardly have been expected to undertake the task himself, but why had not some of the other men at least made an affectation of interesting themselves in the matter, and not left all the *kūdos* to be reaped by Geoffrey Salter? He turned to the assembled guests almost tetchily.

"I am an old man," he said, "and my days for deeds of valor are ended; but I should have thought some of you gentlemen might have put your best legs foremost and helped this young artist fellow to save my granddaughter's horses. I daresay he's more used to this kind of thing than yourselves, still—"

"Stand back, grand-dad," shouted Rachel; "here comes Dryad and my dear little Tommy. Bless his heart! There's only the old mare Jenny left in that stable now."

"I expect the old mare's done for, Miss," suggested a

helper, "for the fire took hold of that end of the stable first."

"The gentleman will catch it too," said another, "if he don't come out soon. It's mortal dangerous to remain there so long. He'd better let the old mare go."

Rachel heard the words, and shuddered. What if he should sacrifice his life in her behalf.

"Mr. Salter," she cried from the threshold of the stable, "come back, I entreat you. You must not stay longer. Never mind the old mare; you must run no further risk."

But there was no response to her appeal.

"Maybe the smoke has took away his senses," remarked a groom. "Perhaps he has fallen into one of the mangers."

Without another thought, Rachel dashed in all her delicate bravery, straight into the blackened edifice.

"My God!" cried the Duke, "Miss Saltoun has gone after him. Are there any men amongst you to stand by and see her go alone?"

Two or three servants then made a feint as though to go to the rescue, and having entered the stable door, stood there, irresolute and sneezing.

Meanwhile Rachel had rushed, by instinct, to the topmost stall, and laid her hand on the back of the old mare, who stood still, but trembling violently.

"Mr. Salter," she called again, "where are you? Can you hear me? Oh, come back, for God's sake!"

"I am here. I am close to you," he answered. "I am trying to unfasten this halter; I can't cut it, I have dropped the knife."

"I can do it. Guide my hand to the rope."

"No, no; you must come no nearer; the fire is close behind us."

"Then leave her—poor beast. You must do no more; it is at the peril of your life."

"I cannot leave her. I should never forgive myself."

"Then I shall unlock the halter!" cried Rachel as she dashed forward, stretching out her bare arms to feel her way. They came in contact with his hands, which were

fumbling with the intricacies of a patent snap, which her practised fingers clicked back in a moment.

But then the horror of her flimsy dress and the numerous sparks flying around, struck him and seizing her in his arms, he carried her straight through the smoke into the courtyard again, and then ran back into the stable.

Rachel was blinded and dizzy, but she knew what had occurred, and screamed out, "Mr. Salter! Mr. Salter!" as he disappeared again.

At that moment there was a shout of relief from all present, as the fire-engine rattled into the yard, and commenced to play upon the burning stable.

Every one was watching the proceedings of the brigade, and seemed to have entirely forgotten the young artist and the old mare.

"Mr. Salter!" panted Rachel again, in an agony of fear, which her grandfather thought fit to reprove.

"Don't make yourself so conspicuous, my dear," he said snappishly; "the young man is safe enough. You are setting everybody talking about you."

"What business is that of yours?" she demanded, sharply, in reply.

But at this juncture Mr. Salter re-appeared, dragging the old mare behind him.

"This poor creature is very much burnt on the foreleg," he said; "I have had the greatest difficulty in getting her out; she would have stood and died there in her terror. She had better be taken away at once and attended to."

"Seems to me, sir, you're a bit burnt yourself," remarked the groom, who twisted his fingers in the old mare's mane.

"Oh, no; only scorched and blackened. I daresay I look a nice object. Miss Saltoun, I hope you are not hurt. I was frightened to death to see you standing there without any other protection than your evening-dress."

"Oh, I am all right; it is you I am thinking of," replied Rachel. "How can I ever thank you, Mr. Salter, for what you have done for me this evening?"

"By not mentioning it. I assure you it is nothing.

How could I have let these poor helpless creatures burn to death?"

"*How?* Why by doing as these other gentlemen have done. Not a man of them stirred to help me—my own paid servants even were afraid to do their duty. The horses would have been cinders by this time if you had not been brave enough and kind enough to go to their rescue. You have done what no one else would do. You are the hero of the occasion, and I honor you for it."

"Rachel," whispered the Duke hurriedly, "you need not make this business so public. You are insulting the remainder of your guests."

"What! by thanking Mr. Salter for his coolness and courage? Well, then, they must be insulted. I will not neglect my duty because they have omitted theirs."

"I don't see any 'duty' about it. I think the whole affair has been conducted most unpleasantly. You hurt my feelings," said the Duke.

"Dear Miss Saltoun, had you not better return to the house?" whispered Mrs. Cranley, who had joined the party by this time, and was trying to wrap a fleecy shawl around her shoulders. "The fire is out now, happily, and the engine is preparing to go back."

"Yes, in a moment. Grand-dad, I wish you and the gentlemen present to be witnesses to what I am about to say. You see this set of cravens here—these grooms and stable-helpers—who take my wages and live on me? Not a soul of them stirred to-night to do their duty. Had I been absent from home this evening, or Mr. Salter had not fortunately been at hand, my favorite horses would have suffered the most cruel of deaths! Matthews, how many of the men employed in my stables are present?"

The head groom stepped forward, and, touching his cap, replied:

"Seven."

"What are their names?"

"Brown, Johnson, Webb, Amory, the two Maddicks and myself, ma'am."

"Very well. You'll all take your month's notice from to-night. Do you understand me?"

"Do you mean we're dismissed, if you please, ma'am?" demanded the groom in a crestfallen manner.

"Dismissed? Yes! a thousand times over. I'd rather do all my work with my own hands, than keep such a set of cowards round me. *Men!* Do you call yourselves *men*? Then, thank God that I am a woman."

There were not many gentlemen present who felt the happier for listening to this address, delivered in Miss Saltoun's most scornful manner; and the Duke of Craig-Morris thought that, for everybody's sake, it was advisable that the scene should be ended.

"Well, well, my dear Rachel," he said; "no one disputes your right to dismiss your servants; but don't you think we had better return to the house? The evening's festivities have been sadly interrupted, and I fancy the air is getting a little chilly; you will catch cold if you remain out here much longer."

"And your dress is in a dreadful state," added Kate Cranley. "Quite ruined. I'm afraid you must change it before you see your guests again,"

"Oh, no, I shan't," said Rachel. "I shall wear it, to keep Mr. Salter in countenance. Come, Mr. Salter, and be so kind as to give me your arm to the house."

"My dear," said the Duke, quickly interposing his arm; "I was about to offer——"

"No, thank you, grand-dad; I will accept no support but that of the hero of the evening, who has so practically proved to us that his heart is as big as his head."

And with a winning smile, she thrust her hand through Geoffrey Salter's arm.

"Oh, Miss Saltoun," he exclaimed, "I am so black and dirty; it is not fit that you should touch me."

"Do you think so?" she said. "That is where we differ. I think you are fit to be presented to the highest lady in the land. I am going to introduce you to my guests as the most honored amongst them all."

"I cannot," exclaimed Geoffrey, drawing back. "You don't know what I shall look like in the light."

"You will look better than if you wore the daintiest evening suit in Christendom. I will allow you to wash

your face and hands, and that is all. If you refuse to accompany me, then I will not return to them either. They must take us both together, and as we are, or not at all."

"A ridiculous fuss about nothing," grumbled his Grace, as he and the other guests returned in her wake to the house; "the young man simply did what anybody else would have done if he had given them the chance. But girls are all hero worshippers, and if they can't find one ready made, they create him for themselves."

"Who *is* this young man?" inquired General Chavasse, in the acrimonious tone with which old men usually speak of young ones. It is not only women who become jealous and bitter when they meet their lost youth and attractions represented in one of their own sex.

"Only a painter, my dear Chavasse. Some artist fellow that my hair-brained grand-daughter has thought fit to pick up. Caught by his pretty face, I suppose. It *will* draw them. *We* know something of that, eh, Chavasse? We haven't forgotten it yet, eh?"

And the two old fools chuckled over some fancied reminiscences together, and wagged their long proboci in concert.

But the Duke of Craig-Morris's manner somewhat altered, when he witnessed the enthusiasm with which the guests of Catherstone greeted the "artist fellow," as soon as they learned his identity.

Rachel had insisted upon his showing himself in the drawing-room. She had dragged him there against his will in his singed and blackened morning suit, and told her friends of the signal service he had rendered her.

The ladies would have been ready to make much of him, under any circumstances. A handsome young fellow who has proved himself to be intrepid and courageous, will always secure the sympathy of the fair sex. But when they heard he was *the* Mr. Salter—the painter of the "Birth of Spring," and 'The Awakening of the Soul,' they crowded round him with flatteries, and compliments, and invitations to visit them, that were almost offensive in their effusiveness.

His Grace of Craig-Morris screwed up his eyes, and humped up his shoulders, and listened to it all with amazement, mingled with alarm. When he had imagined that Geoffrey Salter was a nobody, singled out by Miss Saltoun's caprice for encouragement and patronage, it was bad enough; but now that he found he was a rising man, well known, and generally sought after, it had become dangerous.

He watched the ovation which was being paid the young artist for some moments in silence, and then worked his way up to Mrs. Cranley's side.

"Well, my dear lady, and what is your opinion of all this?" he inquired, in a low voice.

The companion shrugged her shoulders.

"They were alone together for four hours in the park this morning, your Grace," she replied.

"But where were you the while? Why don't you look after her?"

Mrs. Cranley looked up in the Duke's face with elevated brows.

"Does your Grace know so little of Miss Saltoun, as to imagine she would permit of any *espionage*? Do you really think that she allows me to accompany her everywhere, or to act the *rôle* of chaperon? You are very much mistaken. I am simply a blind; my place here is a perfect sinecure. A very pleasant one, your Grace. Miss Saltoun is all kindness and consideration, but I do not enter her presence until I am invited to do so."

"Oh! but this must be put a stop to," said his Grace, frowning; "it won't do at all. It will end in a scandal!" and he walked away again to listen to what the crowd was saying to Mr. Salter.

The women were insisting that he must take some supper after his exertions, and a duchess was tugging at one of his arms, and a countess at the other, as they dragged him to the supper-room, and a bevy of fair creatures followed *en suite*.

"This is intolerable," thought the Duke. "Women are such fools that they will worship any lout who can paint a signboard or whistle a tune, and Rachel is as impres-

sionable as any of them, although she pretends to be so supremely indifferent to everything. I'd have given a thousand pounds to prevent that idiotic fire to-night. However, it's no good thinking about it. The best thing I can do is to talk to Sir Henry Mordaunt."

And his Grace stalked out of Catherstone without saying good-night to anyone, and drove back to London.

Meantime, when her guests had all departed, and Mrs. Cranley was occupied with some domestic matters, the Honorable Rachel Saltoun stood on the threshold of her home, and said to Geoffrey Salter,—

"You will not refuse my friendship after this, Mr Salter, will you? You will not talk again of our standing upon different planes, unless, indeed, it is that yours is a much higher plane than mine?"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GUARDIANS.

THE Duke of Craig-Morris showed as great a contempt for the usages of society as he did for the fashion of its vestments. He had a habit, most unpleasant for his acquaintance, of walking into their houses at all hours of the day—before they had left their beds in the morning, and after they had retired to them at night—and generally upsetting the household.

Sir Henry and Lady Mordaunt were not rich ; they occupied a modest house in Bayswater, and kept three maid-servants, so that Lady Mordaunt was considerably flustered as she was sitting at breakfast, the morning after the fire at Catherstone to hear her daughter Rose exclaim :

“Mamma ! here’s the Duke. I saw his hat above the flower-box ; it is not to be mistaken anywhere.”

“The Duke, my dear ? It is impossible. Why, it’s not ten o’clock yet.”

“My dear mother, didn’t he call last time at eleven o’clock at night, just as you were contemplating putting your feet in hot water to cure your cold ? ”

“Well, Rosie, I can’t see him. He must wait till your father comes down. Tell Maria to show him into the drawing-room.”

And there his Grace was fain to content himself with his own thoughts, until Sir Henry, fresh from his bath, and arranged in dressing-gown and slippers, entered to receive him.

“My dear Duke, I am sorry to have kept you waiting, but really, your hours are so Arcadian, that you must excuse me. I was up late at a smoking-concert last night, and am only just out of bed.”

"It is no matter, Sir Henry. I wish to see you on a subject of importance, and was prepared to wait your convenience. Have you heard of the fire that took place at Catherstone last night?"

"A fire? Good Heavens! No. Not the house, I trust?"

"No! the stables, and, luckily, only one portion of them damaged. But it's about my grand-daughter I wish to speak to you, Sir Henry. You are her uncle and her guardian, and her conduct requires your interference."

"One moment, your Grace. I was my niece's guardian, but by your son's will, I am so no longer. I have no more right to interfere with her behavior than my servant has, and far less than yourself. But I hope it is nothing serious."

"I consider it very serious, Sir Henry; very serious indeed. Rachel is living at Catherstone, with no better protection than a girl of her own age, who is simply under her thumb; and she has an artist fellow, sir—a young man, staying at the house all day, to paint some frip-frapperies for her drawing-room, and she goes on in a disgraceful fashion with him—perfectly disgraceful."

"Your Grace alarms me!" said Sir Henry Mordaunt. "Please be more explicit. What is it that Rachel has done?"

"Well, last night it was one of her *salons*, and when the alarm of fire was given, the gentlemen, naturally, went out to learn the cause of it. Rachel should have remained with her lady guests, but she insisted on accompanying us, dressed just as she was, and interfering with all our efforts for her benefit.

"The stable was partly in flames, and filled with smoke, and the servants were deliberating on the best means of extinguishing it, when in comes this artist fellow, and dashes in, before anyone could forestall his intention, and brings out the horses. So far, there was no harm in it. I daresay the young man has been better used to that sort of thing than any of the gentlemen present; and he was useful—decidedly useful.

"But my grand-daughter wouldn't let it rest there. She must needs rush in after him, screaming out his name, so that the whole of Roehampton must have heard her, and then was overcome by the smoke, and had to be carried out in his arms. And after it was over, and the fire extinguished, she made so much fuss about him as if he had been one of the heroes of Soudan.

"By Jove, sir, it sickened me to see the way she went on! She took him into the drawing-room, just as he was, covered with black and the smell of fire, and introduced him to her guests; and when I left, the women were hanging over him in a way that made me ill, Sir Henry, ill," repeated the Duke, bringing his stick down heavily on the floor; "and it must be put a stop to. I insist upon its being put a stop to."

"What does your Grace propose to put a stop to?"

"That girl must not live alone any longer, Sir Henry. She must live with you and Lady Mordaunt; or you must find some suitable *duenna* to take up her residence at Catherstone. I will not have this state of things continue. It's a disgrace to the family—it reflects discredit on our name. And, mark my words, it will end in some terrible scandal."

Sir Henry Mordaunt leant his head on his hands, in the attitude of thought. They were the same sentiments he held—the same fears he had expressed to himself. But Rachel was his sister's child, and he would not condemn her hastily.

"Well—well?" cried the Duke, petulantly, as though urging him to speak.

"Your Grace's words have hurt me very much," he said at length, "and all the more so because I acknowledge their truth. Mrs. Cranley strikes me as an utterly unfit chaperon for Rachel. In the first place, she is too young; in the second, too unsteady. Miss Montrie was far more suitable for the position. But, you see how it was. Rachel dismissed her for no fault, except that of taking too close an interest in her private affairs. She will not stand any advice, and resents all *espionage*. And we are powerless, your Grace, powerless."

"Powerless?—rubbish! What! with a girl of three-and-twenty! We must *make* her submit."

"I must come to you to learn the way, then, for *I* don't know it, Duke," replied the baronet. "I was exceedingly annoyed when I heard that Rachel had engaged Mr. Salter to paint her drawing-room for some exorbitant sum. She has also bought his Academy picture for two thousand pounds. Why will she throw her money away in this reckless manner, when Catherstone is already decorated from garret to basement?"

"You should prevent it."

"I *cannot* prevent it, your Grace. By her father's will, Rachel is absolutely her own mistress. You should know that as well as myself. And she is not amenable to persuasion; she has the most determined will and proudest nature I ever met. If she makes up her mind about a thing, no one can turn her from it."

"So we are to sit by and see her make ducks and drakes of her fortune without daring to remonstrate with her, and end, perhaps, by seeing her elope with this painter?"

"Good Heavens! your Grace cannot think of what you are saying! You are speaking of your grand-daughter and my niece."

"I don't care whose grand-daughter and whose niece she is, Sir Henry. She's an obstinate, self-willed jade, and if we don't interfere in the matter, she'll make a fool of herself about this man."

"But, my dear Duke, you must excuse me, but what reason have you to think so? Ray is devoted to Art—mad over it, I will allow—but she could never permit herself to have any other feeling respecting this Mr. Salter."

"Art be d——d!" ejaculated the Duke. "You should have seen her hanging over him last night, and paying him compliments. She wasn't thinking much of Art then, I'll be bound."

"But all the women of fashion rave in that silly manner over artists nowadays," said Sir Henry; "it's the craze of the century. And I cannot believe that Ray would go any

further ; she's too proud—too cold ! She refused Lord Vivian this season."

"I know it. But she's just the sort of girl to refuse a nobleman and marry a costermonger."

"No, no, your Grace ; you wrong her. She will never stoop to marriage with a man who is her inferior by birth ; she is as proud of her blue blood and her unstained name as you can be. She might flirt with him and fool him—I don't deny that—but she would never consent to anything more. You may make your mind easy on that score."

"Who *is* this man, Salter, Sir Henry ?" demanded the Duke, peering at him from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"I have not the least idea. He is a rising young painter, and his pictures are beginning to be much talked about. *On dit* he will be a R.A. soon. But as to his family, or antecedents, I know nothing."

"I should like to find out all about him," said his Grace, musingly. "I wonder who could do it for us ? If we could only convince that girl that he has risen from a ploughboy, or a tinker, she might see the folly of letting their intimacy go too far. The deuce of it all is that he is so good-looking. If he only had red hair and a squint, I should feel easier."

"Is he so very handsome, then ? I have not seen him," remarked Sir Henry.

"Oh ! with the prettiness of a woman ; big eyes and chiselled nose, and that sort of thing, but the kind of face that girls fall down to all the same. Now ! how can we get at his antecedents ?"

"Your Grace is really worrying yourself and me to no purpose," exclaimed the baronet, as he rose and paced the room impatiently. "I cannot, for a moment, entertain the idea that my niece would go further than to patronize a man in Mr. Salter's position. Why ! she must marry into the aristocracy ; and she *will*, there's no doubt of it ! Her fortune should purchase a coronet. Meanwhile, our hands are tied. We may do what we can, surreptitiously, to keep her in the straight path, but, as sure as we show our hand, Rachel will go her own way. She is very like the Irish-

man's pig in that respect, and my advice, your Grace, is to leave her alone."

"Well, it wasn't much use my coming here, evidently," said the Duke, rising. I thought we might have arrived at some arrangement for her living with her aunt and you. A far more suitable and natural one for her, than running about alone at Catherstone."

"I have proposed it to Rachel more than once, without effect, and I am afraid she has reigned too long to abdicate her throne now. The best thing we can do is to find her a prince consort."

"Oh! Ah!" mused the Duke. "Now, what do you think of Lord Connelly? There's a man for you—young—well-bred—and good-looking. He wants nothing but money——"

"And brains," interrupted Sir Henry.

"Bother the brains. When did a woman ever look beneath the surface? He'd do, eh? Suppose I moot the question to him. What do you think of it?"

"I think Ray would never speak to him again. She tells me she shall never marry. That is, of course, nonsense; but I am certain, *when* she marries, that she will choose a man for herself, and choose *well*. I am assured of it."

"I wish I were, too," replied the Duke. "However, I won't detain you longer, Sir Henry. I dare say you want to get to your breakfast."

"Will your Grace join us?"

"No, thanks! Had mine an hour ago. I was in hopes I might have persuaded you to run over to Catherstone and see what you could do with Rachel."

"I don't mind running down to Catherstone. I should have gone there any way, after hearing of the fire. But I don't quite see what I can say to Ray. It appears to me that she has as much right to have her drawing-room decorated as any other lady. And if Mrs. Cranley is not a very efficient chaperon, still she is actually there."

"Well, good-morning—good-morning!" cried the Duke. "Hope everything may come right, but I have my doubts of it. Compliments to her ladyship." And out shuffled

his Grace of Craig-Morris, to exhibit his shabby clothes in the broad light of the summer morning.

"What on earth has the old man kept you so long for?" inquired Lady Mordaunt, as her husband entered the breakfast-room. "It is unconscionable, his coming at this hour. The coffee is cold, and the fish burned to a cinder. Shall I order it fresh for you?"

"No, no! Anything will do," replied the Baronet, in a tone of vexation.

"He's been worrying you, Henry. I can see that."

"He has, indeed. He was full of tales and insinuations against Ray, as usual. The poor child can never do a single thing but he's down upon her!"

"What has she done now?" inquired his wife.

"Engaged Salter, the artist, to paint some panels at Catherstone, and the Duke declares it is improper that the man should be in the house. As if he could paint the walls without seeing them. He is not even sleeping there. It is perfectly ridiculous. The Duke would tie the girl's hands completely."

"But I think Rachel is rather extravagant," remarked Lady Mordaunt, with a little sigh, as she glanced at her own girls, simply clad in print dresses. "It seems so unfair that one girl should possess fifteen thousand a-year, whilst others have to dress on thirty pounds."

"My dear! that is quite another phase of the question. Begging your pardon, there's no unfairness in it; but we are not discussing that now. Rachel has a perfect right to spend her money as she chooses, and considering the amount of her fortune, I do not call her extravagant. It is the propriety of her conduct that her grandfather cavils at. And that I would answer for as I would for my own daughters."

"Why, of course! What a shame!" cried Lady Mordaunt, warmly. "What has the dear girl ever done to deserve such censure? She is most reticent in society—almost too much so. Quite distant in her manner, especially to gentlemen. I think the old man ought to be ashamed of himself."

"So do I, and I almost told him so. However, I shall

go over to Catherstone after breakfast, and try and find out what all the fuss is about. By-the-way, they had an alarm of fire there last night, and part of the stables was damaged. Ray rushed in to the rescue of her beloved horses in all her finery, which seems to have been a great crime in her grandfather's eyes."

"It was a very brave thing to do," said Lady Mordaunt, "but very dangerous. Give Ray my love, and tell her she mustn't risk her life in that way, for all our sakes. She is a dear girl; but it is sad she should be left to herself. If she were only married!"

"Yes, indeed, if she were only married!" echoed Sir Henry, with a sigh, as he rose from the table, and prepared to depart on his errand.

When he reached Catherstone, he walked round first to the stables, which presented a mournful appearance. Benwell, the bailiff and overseer, was examining them with a master-builder, as Sir Henry Mordaunt appeared, and gave him the whole history of the catastrophe.

"I didn't happen to be present, Sir Henry—though I don't know as I could have done much if I had been—but I live in Roehampton, and Preedy, the coachman, was out with friends. No one will confess how it occurred, but there's no doubt in my mind it was from some carelessness on the part of the grooms. However, Miss Saltoun has cleared out seven of them, so it won't happen again—not with *them*, at all events."

"Cleared out seven of them?" repeated the Baronet.

Benwell laughed.

"Yes, Sir Henry; you know her way. It seems they hesitated a bit about entering the stables, and she gave the whole lot warning. And I say she was right. If it hadn't been for the gentleman, the five horses would all have been burned."

"Do you mean Mr. Salter?"

"The same, Sir Henry. There's no doubt he's a plucky 'un. Went straight in through all the smoke and fire, and cut their halters. And Miss Saltoun helped him. I don't believe there's another such a couple in all Roehampton."

"They are not hurt, I hope?"

"I hear the gentleman's hand is a bit burnt, but Miss Saltoun is as right as a trivet. She was down here a minute ago, talking with Mr. Bowman about building the stable up again. We want it done at once. We have the five horses stabled down at the farm, where we haven't over much room now."

"Ah! well, I'll go up and see my niece about it. Good morning, Benwell."

"Good-morning, Sir Henry," replied the overseer, as the Baronet strolled on to the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

A HOME THRUST.

KATE CRANLEY would not have disliked at all to follow the instructions given her by the Duke of Craig-Morris, and cut Rachel Saltoun out with Geoffrey Salter. Not that she dreamt of such a thing as marrying him. His position was not yet sufficiently assured for that. But she was an incorrigible flirt, and time hung rather heavily on her hands at Catherstone. Miss Saltoun was too fond of a country life to suit her companion's taste. She went too seldom to London, and cared too little for opera boxes, concerts, and balls. All these things might have been at her disposal nightly, but she considered the pleasure of attending them too little to compensate for the trouble. And they had made the life of Kate Cranley. Ever since her husband's death (and even before it) her greatest joy had been the false excitement of (so called) gayety—the doubtful delight of being taken out to the theatre, or some other place of amusement, by some man, for the time being devoted to herself. There had been a regiment of such admirers crowded into Kate Cranley's five and twenty years—men for whom she had not entertained the slightest feeling, and who had felt but the merest spark of passion for herself—but from whom she had accepted all that it was in their power to give her. And now it was all over.

She had exchanged her life of poverty and Bohemianism for one of luxury and propriety, and the change did not agree with her. She hoped to make it profitable in the end; to make it the means, indeed, to a good marriage; but up to the present, the man to be deluded had not made his appearance, and Mrs. Cranley felt her hand was getting out.

She would have tried it upon Mr. Salter, whose appearance had greatly struck her, but it was so difficult to find him alone. As soon as he arrived in the morning, and commenced painting, Miss Saltoun's easel was erected by his side; and though she had invited her companion to join them in their studies, Kate Cranley knew the old proverb about "two being company" too well to intrude her presence unnecessarily. Flirtation lost its zest for her unless it could be conducted secretly. If she could manage to intercept Geoffrey Salter on his walks to and from the Roehampton Arms, or to procure an interview with him at the inn itself, that might be worth having, she thought; for surely, with these eyes, he could not be unsusceptible to woman's charms. But all this had nothing to do with the Duke's offer to make it worth her while. Kate did not quite believe in the Duke's generosity. She had thought it over, and come to the conclusion that, of the two, Miss Saltoun was the more likely to pay her for keeping the matter secret, than the Duke for making it public.

If she had believed there was any chance of entrapping the old nobleman himself for a husband, Kate Cranley would have gone any lengths to secure the prize, but there were other ways of doing that besides betraying her patroness, even if she pretended to do so. No! it was a little *amourette* on her own account she was thinking of just now. She was actually *eprise* with Geoffrey Salter's beauty, she couldn't get it out of her head, and she longed for Miss Saltoun's opportunities of seeing and speaking with him alone. She was engaged in this manner on the morning after the fire, when Sir Henry Mordaunt entered the library.

"How do you do, Mrs. Cranley? I hope my niece has not suffered from her fright of last evening?"

"You have heard all about it, then, Sir Henry? No! I am thankful to say she is quite well, and working away at her painting as usual. Miss Saltoun has a wonderful nerve; nothing seems to upset it. Shall I tell her you are here?"

"Where is she?"

"In the drawing-room, painting with Mr. Salter."

"I prefer not to disturb her then. I will go to the drawing-room," said Sir Henry, who was curious to have a look at the artist he had heard so much about.

"Allow me to show you the way," exclaimed Mrs. Cranley, officiously, as she opened the library door and trotted along by his side.

Rachel, who was smothered up to her chin in a dark print blouse, jumped up affectionately to greet her uncle.

"How are you, dear old nunky?" she said, kissing him. "Have you heard of the fire?"

"Yes, dear; that is why I came down. It is a great misfortune. How did it happen?"

"No one knows. But this is the gentleman who saved all my horses, and burned his hand while doing so."

"Luckily my left hand," interposed Geoffrey smiling.

"Uncle Henry, let me present Mr. Geoffrey Salter to you. Mr. Salter, this is my uncle—Sir Henry Mordaunt."

"I am glad to make your acquaintance," said the baronet, shaking hands with the young artist. I have heard, in common with the rest of society, of your rising fame, Mr. Salter; but your act of last night seems to have been a very plucky thing, and quite uncalled for on your part."

"I can hardly agree to that, Sir Henry. Common humanity would have prompted anyone to the act. Miss Saltoun was much braver than myself; she rushed into the midst of the fire, with her bare arms and flimsy dress, entirely unprotected."

"And should have caught alight most likely if Mr. Salter had not saved me as he did the horses. Uncle Henry, don't let him decry the great service he has rendered me. He was sketching the Fairies' Glade, by moonlight, right in to the middle of the park, when he saw the smoke and sparks rising above the trees. So he left all his painting things behind him, and rushed back to see what he could do to help us, and he arrived only just in time. Ten minutes later and no one could have entered the stables, and my poor darling horses would all have been killed."

"What were your men about?"

"*Brutes!*" cried Ray, emphatically; "not one of them would stir. They were too frightened. I have dismissed the whole lot!"

"So Benwell told me just now. And he also told me, Ray, that you rushed into the stable after Mr. Salter. That was very wrong of you, my dear. It was an awful risk."

"Oh! I couldn't have stayed there doing nothing!" exclaimed the girl with glowing eyes.

"But you should remember how valuable your life is."

"Not so valuable as Mr. Salter's. No one would have missed me much, but if *he* had died we should have had no more pictures."

Geoffrey went on vigorously painting his panel. He had no answer to make to this. He was thinking only of what his people would have thought if he had perished in the fire.

"Well, thank God, it is over and not much harm done," said Sir Henry Mordaunt; "but pray be more careful should such a thing occur again. You aunt charged me with a lot of messages for you, Ray. We are going to Scarborough next week, and unless you will visit us before we start, we may not see you again. Have you settled any plans for the autumn yourself?"

"I won't keep you standing here, Uncle Henry; I'll come and hear dear Aunt Mary's messages in the library," replied Rachel as she divested herself of her working blouse. "*Au revoir*, Mr. Salter," she cried gayly as she left room with the baronet, "I am afraid you will not see me again this morning."

Mrs. Cranley did not follow her, but stood by the chair she had vacated, silently criticising her canvas.

"What do you think of Miss Saltoun's painting, Mr. Salter?" she asked presently in a low voice.

"That is rather a strange question to ask a master of his pupil, Mrs. Cranley," he replied.

"Oh! is she your pupil? I didn't understand. I thought you didn't take them."

"Not in a business way. But I suppose that, for the present, Miss Saltoun may be considered my pupil. How-

ever, there is really no reason you should not hear my opinion of her. For an amateur, I think she is very good."

"Humph! yes," replied Kate Cranley, musingly, "rather too fine a touch perhaps."

"Her touch will broaden with practice. She is timid of her own powers as yet."

"And you will develop them?"

"I hope so; or teach her how to develop them for herself."

Kate Cranley sighed.

"How I wish," she murmured, "I had the advantage of such a master."

"You draw?" he said, interrogatively.

"Oh, yes. Hasn't Miss Saltoun told you? I used to be considered the better artist of the two, but doubtless she will outstrip me now."

"I don't see why she should."

"Not with you to guide her hand? Why, I feel as if I could do anything with such a soul as yours to direct my efforts."

"I am afraid you would be disappointed," replied Geoffrey, as he returned to the task of mixing his colors.

"Success lies in ourselves; no one can command it for us, and if a pupil has no innate talent, neither Titian nor Michael Angelo could give it to him."

"But you think Miss Saltoun has talent?" said Kate Cranley, still staring at the easel.

"I do."

"But this is only a copy of yours."

"True. But I am not helping her; she is doing it by herself. She just watches me lay on the colors, and does the same. It is the best means of learning, in my opinion."

"Ah! who wouldn't watch?" said Kate Cranley, throwing a languishing glance at him, "if—if——"

"If—what?" demanded the young man, uncompromisingly, for her manner annoyed him.

"Now don't scold me," said Kate, with a pretty affectation of fear of censure; "but I was going to say, what woman wouldn't watch you if she had the opportunity. I

am afraid I should do all the watching and none of the work."

"That would be very detrimental to yourself," he replied, abruptly, and in a tone almost of displeasure.

But Mrs. Cranley could see the blood rise to the parting of his dark hair.

"Perhaps. Doubtless," she said, with a deep-drawn sigh; "but I am afraid we women are not very wise in such matters, and our success in any branch of learning depends more upon the teacher than the study."

"You make no allowance, then, for the love of art?" remarked Geoffrey Salter.

"Oh, yes, I do! when it doesn't clash with another sort of love, which is, after all, more necessary to our existence. You may remember what Byron says about that, Mr. Salter? 'Man's love is of man's life, a thing apart; 'tis——'"

"I remember perfectly," he said, interrupting the quotation; "but I imagined we were speaking about painting."

The snub was so pre-evident, that Mrs. Cranley was forced to take it.

"Yes; of course we were," she said; "but I thought the other subject was more interesting. But, perhaps, you have abjured it, Mr. Salter?"

"Abjured what?"

"The tender passion."

"I have no time for nonsense, if that is what you mean," he replied.

"Oh, what a horrid term to apply to it," she cried affectedly. "And I always thought you men of genius were more than usually susceptible to love. I have heard that when the strain on your brains is relaxed, the pendulum swings back with greater force in the opposite direction, and makes you like melting wax in a woman's hands."

"Indeed! How very unpleasant, especially for the woman. But the strain is not off my brain at present, Mrs. Cranley. On the contrary, I feel rather more perplexed than usual. Miss Saltoun is bent upon dragging the village forge into one of these panels, and I don't see

my way to making a good picture of it. But I suppose she will not be happy if I leave it out."

"You seem very anxious to please Miss Saltoun in every way," remarked Kate Cranley, acrimoniously.

"Naturally. The panels are being painted to her order. She has every right to choose the subjects of them."

"Oh, yes; she has money. That's at the bottom of all good things in this world. Money can buy everything, even down to love!"

"Hardly that, surely?"

"Why, hasn't it bought it since the world began? The love, both of men and women, or an excellent imitation of it, which does quite as well."

Geoffrey Salter made no answer to this remark, and Kate moved about the room, humming a waltz to herself, and pirouetting to her own music in a silly, childish manner.

Rachel entered suddenly as she was thus engaged.

"Why, Mrs. Cranley!" she exclaimed, with elevated eyebrows. "Have you gone daft at twelve o'clock in the morning?"

"Oh, I'm sure I beg your pardon, Miss Saltoun. I didn't hear you enter. I was only waltzing off a little vexation. It's a way of mine. But if Sir Henry is gone, I will return to my duties in the library. He interrupted me in the midst of looking over the weekly accounts."

"Yes, he has gone. He couldn't stay," said Rachel, as she slipped into her blouse again. "Oh, Mr. Salter, how fast you do paint! You have got miles ahead of me during my short absence. Have pity and stop for a little while, and tell me how to get up with you again."

As Kate Cranley left the room, she watched the alacrity with which the young artist quitted his seat and approached the side of Miss Saltoun, and said to herself:

"If I don't stop it, that will be a case, as sure as God made little apples."

"I did not know I had done so much," said Geoffrey, as he looked up at his panel; "your companion's tongue went so fast that my brush must have kept time to it. She is a wonderful talker."

"Yes; she is very entertaining, is she not?"

"Humph! that depends upon her listener, I suppose. I can't say I find her so."

"I don't think you quite like Mrs. Cranley, Mr. Salter."

"I have had no opportunity yet to find out whether I like her or dislike her."

"I fancied she was a woman who took very much at first sight, especially with gentlemen. She is very handsome, is she not?"

"Yes, she is handsome—at all events, outwardly."

Rachel laughed.

"I see you will not give her credit for the cardinal virtues until you have proved them. But, at all events, she is amusing, and she suits me. I require a bright, capable assistant to receive my friends in my absence. I had a poor old thing here for years—ever since I left school, in fact. You would have laughed to see her, Mr. Salter. She had a round, fat, meaningless face, like a baby, and she was very like a baby in her manner. I couldn't speak to her without making her cry."

"Perhaps she was attached to you."

"She was, I believe, in her way. But it was a very tiresome way. She was always fussing and fuming over me like a cat over a kitten and I couldn't stand it. Besides, she was utterly useless. So I sent her away."

"For no fault?" demanded the young man.

"She was impertinent," said Rachel, with a slight access of color.

"Impertinence! That is a grave fault, especially in a dependant. Doubtless, the poor old lady deeply regrets it now. Does she not tell you so?"

"She has had no opportunity of telling me. I have never seen Miss Montrie since she left Catherstone. She may be dead for aught I know to the contrary. She worried me so completely, I never wish to see her again."

The artist was silent.

"Shall I use Indian-red for the foreground?" said Rachel, presently, glancing up from her palette to his face, which was looking very grave and stern.

He nodded his head in reply.

"I suppose you think I *ought* to have seen her," the girl went on hurriedly; "but if you only knew how she worried me, and how I hate being kissed and cried over, you would understand my relief at seeing the last of her. Besides, she has plenty of friends. She's all right."

Geoffrey took up his own palette at this juncture, and fell to work again.

"Say I'm wrong at once, but don't keep your mouth shut in that provoking manner," cried Rachel, impatiently.

"What right have I to find fault with anything you say or do, Miss Saltoun?" replied Geoffrey.

"No right, perhaps, but it is aggravating to hear you maintain an utter silence on the subject. I know you think I'm a wretch—a hard-hearted, unfeeling wretch—and that I ought not to have parted with Miss Montrie at all. Why aren't you honest, and say it?"

"Because it is not my place to say it, Miss Saltoun, neither do I know enough of the matter to pass an opinion upon it. After what I saw you do for your horses last night, I could never call you hard-hearted nor unfeeling; therefore, I conclude you must have had some excellent reason for parting with your late companion, particularly if she loved you. You would not be less considerate of an old woman than of your horses."

"I'm afraid it was just because she was an old woman that I sent her away. She was past her work, and she was nervous, and twaddled. And I have never been to see her since, nor asked after her. I don't even know where she is—and I have thought sometimes—I have told myself that—that—"

Miss Saltoun did not seem able to proceed with her speech; she bent over her painting, crimson and uneasy—feeling, without having seen, that Mr. Salter's eyes were fixed upon her. Presently she lifted hers and encountered them. How very grave they were, and yet how pitying and kind! From most people Rachel would have resented this look as an insult; but from Geoffrey Salter (for some unaccountable reason) it struck her like a revelation of herself, and casting her head down again, she felt the tears fill her eyes. The proud lips were pressed forcibly together to

prevent the humiliating weakness, but they were powerless to stay it. She was compelled, much against her will to make a quick dash at her wet eyes with her handkerchief, and trust that Mr. Salter had not seen her.

"What have you told yourself?" he asked presently. "That it was scarcely worth the while of a young woman who has everything this world can give to make her happy, to take undue offence at the weaknesses of a poor old creature who probably has very little? I daresay that to you, Miss Saltoun, who are surrounded by luxury and love—"

Rachel shook her head.

"No," she said; "I have plenty of luxury, but not much love. Of course, Uncle Henry and Aunt Mary love me in a certain way, but I have been first with nobody since my dear parents died. The Saltouns rather dislike me than otherwise, and I have no brothers or sisters to fill up the gap."

"I wonder you can afford to despise love, then, even from a dependant. You love your animals, Miss Saltoun, dearly. I have often seen you caressing your mastiff and your mare——"

"Yes," she answered, looking up with a smile; but they are so much nicer to kiss, you know, than an old woman!"

But Geoffrey did not smile.

"Do you think so?" he said. "It appears to me that old women are very hardly treated in this world. To think that they have been young, and perhaps pretty, and with the ball of love at their feet—and then, just because Time has rolled on, and they have suffered, and lost hope, and looks, and friends, they are to be laughed at as ridiculous. It often strikes me as being pitifully hard. And how any man who has loved his mother, and trembled lest Heaven should take her from him—how any woman, who hopes to preserve her health to late years, can think lightly of or neglect an old and feeble woman, seems a perfect anomaly to me. We should be so very tender to those who stand in need of that which we may lack some day ourselves. Don't you agree with me?"

CHAPTER XV.

A SUDDEN CONVICTION.

"YES," said Rachel Saltoun, after a pause; "I do agree with you, but no one has ever spoken to me like that before. I haven't looked on things in that light. I suppose you think I owe a duty to Miss Montrie, and I have neglected to perform it?"

"I think we all owe a duty to one another in this world," replied the young man, still with his back towards her, and occupied with his brush; "and those of us who may be rich, a double duty to the poor. I suppose no one can disbelieve that we shall be asked what we have done with our opportunities, when we enter upon another life, and that our answer will materially affect our happiness."

"You so thoroughly believe in another life," said Rachel.

"I do, thank God! I can imagine no more miserable and hopeless condition than not believing in it. To what end do we work, or strive to do our duty, if not to gain eternity? You surely would not be satisfied with the little this life affords us? This appreciation of art, for instance, which we mutually share, is it to be bounded by the finite efforts of this world, and not to be enlarged and perfected in the next? I should have no heart to go on with it if I thought that. I look upon our mortal aspirations as simply schooling for a more exalted work-room—as education does not so much impart instruction, as teach the student how to educate himself. We cannot see half the beauties there are in Nature now. The grossness of our humanity has dimmed our eyes, and we grope in the dark like blind people. Had we a clearer vision, do you suppose we should not see the feathers on the butterfly's wings, and all the minute wonders that pervade

the universe? But I conclude—I hope that we shall have no need of microscopes hereafter, and that our minds will open with our eyes.”

“I wish that I believed as you do,” said Miss Saltoun, with a sigh.

“You have only to look at the matter in a reasonable light to believe it. Do you imagine that God made this universe for His own pleasure or for ours? If for ours, His plan has failed, for we are all more or less unhappy. If for His own, there must be a Hereafter to compensate this Present, or you make Him act as a monster, who created a world of beings only to suffer until they are annihilated. I wonder what put such terrible ideas into your head?” he added, musingly.

“I am afraid I have read myself into them,” replied Miss Saltoun. “I have been left alone since I came home from school to choose my own studies, and I am very fond of German literature. I have studied Kant, and Hegel, and Schopenhauer, and several other authors, till I have become imbued with their doctrine. But it is a very unsatisfactory one. I have never been quite happy since. It leaves one so little to live for. And I began life by thinking I had so much.”

“It is difficult to imagine anyone having more,” said Geoffrey, “and when one thinks of how many have less——”

“Poor Miss Montrie, for example,” interposed Rachel, with a nervous laugh.

“Exactly—poor Miss Montrie; though not being acquainted with the old lady, I don’t quite know why I should call her ‘poor,’ unless it be that few changes could be an advantage after having lived with you.”

“Ah! you don’t know me,” said Rachel, shaking her head. “I am very difficult to get on with sometimes; I have a high temper, and an arbitrary disposition, and people say I am cold and heartless.”

“I don’t agree with ‘people,’” remarked Geoffrey.

“How can you tell? You know so little of me? And I think I am cold; nothing seems to move me much. I don’t care enough for things to get excited over them.”

"Except when your horses are in danger of being roasted alive."

"Ah! the poor darlings," with a shiver. "Don't talk of it! How terrified they were. And you might have lost your life with theirs."

"We both might."

"I know it. I shall never look back upon last night without shuddering. It was terrible whilst it lasted."

"You are right. And yet you believe that if our lives *had* been sacrificed, we should have been nowhere to-day—inanimate clay, like the poor horses, and without hope of a resurrection! These busy eyes and hands of ours closed and still for evermore! These hearts and souls, that can loyally appreciate the beauties of Nature, trodden down into nothingness by Nature's God."

He walked round to her easel as he spoke, and contemplated her morning's work.

"I don't think I *quite* believed it," replied Rachel, almost timidly. "I have never believed it on conviction; only because I have known nothing better to believe. It is all so dark and mysterious. It seems easier to think that when we die, we are done with, than to try and penetrate a mystery which is insoluble."

"It will not be so dark to you some day," said Geoffrey Salter. "You will long for immortality, and the belief will follow the desire. A little more ochre in that path, Miss Saltoun, and less cobalt in the shadows. That branch hangs right over the water."

"Thanks! I see it does. But what is likely to make me long for immortality, Mr. Salter? I don't seem to care about it now. I think I should prefer to sleep forever. What can change my idea on the subject?"

"Love," replied Geoffrey.

The girl started.

"*Love!* Oh, I hope not! I don't want to be married."

"It does not follow that you need be married. But directly we love anyone truly—whether happily or otherwise—a great longing arises for the eternity, where our love can never be forgotten, or die."

"Have you ever felt so, Mr. Salter?" asked Rachel audaciously.

The artist colored.

"I have thought I did. Perhaps I was mistaken. But it did not need that, to make me believe in God, or Heaven. My mother's love was sufficient for that."

"You love your mother very dearly, don't you?" said Rachel.

"More than I could tell you, Miss Saltoun."

"What is she like?"

"Very frail and fragile. A little woman, who looks as if a breath of wind would blow her away. It used to look very funny to see her surrounded by her four sons. Any one of us could lift her with one hand."

"She is not sick, I hope?"

"Not worse than she has been for some years past. Naturally, she is no longer young; and she has a good deal of worry and anxiety, lately."

"I am sorry," said the girl, softly.

"Thank you," replied the young man.

The luncheon-bell sounded at this moment, and Miss Saltoun rose to leave the painting-room. Mr. Salter took her blouse from her, and threw it over his arm.

"Shall you be here this afternoon?" he asked.

"Not this afternoon, Mr. Salter. I have some business to do. But don't go on without me. Go and take a walk instead."

He laughed, and shook his head.

"That would never do. I pride myself on my punctuality. But I will go and try to reduce that obstinate village forge into something like a proper shape, if you like. I think that had better go into one of our night panels. The sparks from the anvil, and the red-hot iron, will show out better against the darkness."

"Yes! and you must draw 'Adonis' being shod. All my horses have been shod there, you know, from time immemorial. It will be lovely!"

And Rachel, her eyes beaming once more with pleasure, gave him a bright smile, and departed.

"What a grand creature she is!" thought Geoffrey, as

he returned to his painting. "Proud she may be in a sense, for she has been brought up to consider name and position above everything in the world. But cold and heartless—never. She is as easily moved as a child. I saw the tears in her eyes when we were speaking of her old companion. The fact is, she has never had anybody to lead her right, and bring out her best impulses. She has not had enough family affection. If she had had a mother like mine, now, how different a woman she would have been."

And he whistled less over his work that afternoon than usual, and thought more of Miss Saltoun and her undeveloped virtues.

Meanwhile, Rachel was telling Mrs. Cranley that she required the carriage at three o'clock.

"Am I to go with you, dear Miss Saltoun?"

"Not this afternoon, Mrs. Cranley, thank you. I am going to call upon an old friend."

But first she ordered the carriage to drive to her uncle's house in Ladgrove Square, where she encountered her aunt, Lady Mordaunt.

"Aunt Mary!" she said, as she embraced her; "I have come up for two reasons. First, to kiss you and the girls before you go to Scarborough, and secondly, to ask if you know the address of my old watch dog, Miss Montrie."

"Oh, yes! dear Ray! The poor thing called on me and left it. Lena, look in that blotting-book, and find Miss Montrie's address. Are you thinking of writing to her, Ray? It would be kind of you, my dear, for the poor old lady is in a terrible distress."

"Distress! Aunt Mary? How can that be? I paid her a whole year's salary."

"Oh, it isn't that, dear! though she is living with a sister-in law, who, I expect will get most of it out of her. But she has taken leaving Catherstone so much to heart that I hear she is quite ill—laid up, in fact, and unable to work."

Rachel reddened.

"I can't understand her making such a fuss about it as all that, Aunt Mary. She had been with me for six years,

you know, and she was really not fit for the position."

"I know it, Ray. I have told your uncle so a dozen times. But though Miss Montrie is a stupid old thing, I fancy she is rather soft and affectionate, and had attached herself to you; and fancied she should live the rest of her life at Catherstone. Very silly of her, of course, and it is not to be supposed you could take her fancies into consideration—only, as you mention it, I tell you what I think."

"Yes, Aunt Mary. And what is the address?"

"Here it is, Ray!" replied Lena: "19 Parmiter Street, Hackney."

"What a dreadful place," said Lady Mordaunt. "You mustn't go there, Rachel."

"I think I will, Aunt. I can't get any harm from it, and I should like to see the old lady myself."

"She'll go half out of her wits for joy," said Lady Mordaunt. "When she mentioned your name to me, she cried as if her heart would break."

"And she is laid up, you say?"

"Yes. I wrote for her to call on me again about a situation with one of my friends, and received an answer to say she was suffering from acute rheumatism and could not leave the house. So your very generous compensation, Ray, must come in as a welcome assistance."

"I think I will go at once," said Miss Saltoun, as she bade farewell to her relations, and drove away again.

"What has come to Rachel to-day?" observed her cousin Lena. "I never saw her so grave and solemn before."

"Perhaps she thinks she acted a little too hastily with regard to Miss Montrie," replied her mother; "And I hope she does, for I am sure she has made a very bad exchange in engaging that fast and flighty-looking Mrs. Cranley."

"It is very unlike Rachel to *repent*," laughed Lena; "in general, the worse she has acted the more she declares she was right. Somebody must have been talking to her."

"There's no one who dares do so, more's the pity, poor child!" said Lady Mordaunt. "No, it is her naturally

good heart that has spoken to her, and I am glad of it, for Miss Montrie's sake, as well as her own."

Rachel's magnificent bays were not long in taking her down to Hackney, and up to the door of No. 19 Parmiter Street.

The little girl who first answered the door to the footman ran away at the sight of so much magnificence, and was succeeded by a gaunt, untidy-looking female with red hair. To the question, if Miss Montrie lived there, and was at home, she answered in the affirmative, but added a rider to the effect that she kept her room, and could see no one.

"Miss Montrie will see *me*, I am sure," said Rachel, who had left the carriage. "I am Miss Saltoun, her late employer. Please ask her if I may go up."

At this announcement the red-haired woman became considerably flurried, and showed her visitor into a meagre little parlor, making hurried dashes the while at the curl-papers which adorned her head, and looking about her with a nervous air, as she said she would inform her sister-in-law, Miss Montrie, of her arrival.

As she was left alone, Rachel glanced round the little parlor with a deep sense of pity. The American oilcloth on the table, the wax flowers under a glass case on the mantelshelf, the fern in a china pot set on a chess-table, covered with a white crochet antimacassar, in the window.

How had poor Miss Montrie borne these things after six years' enjoyment of the luxuries of Catherstone? Rachel closed her eyes as she thought of it. She had not realized what the change would be to her before; she had imagined that she would only pass from one engagement to another; she had not calculated on sickness coming between her and the work by which she made her living.

She sat there, looking at her mean and vulgar surroundings, and listening to the discordant chattering of children in a room close by, alternated by an occasional yell as one among them received a cuff from the other, until she felt as if she could carry her poor old companion off in her carriage, then and there and never let her return to such a horrible home again. She found herself thinking more

of Miss Montrie's continual good nature at that moment than of her stupidity—more of her attention to, and care for, herself than of her officiousness or blundering. And when, after the lapse of a few minutes, the red-haired woman returned to say that Miss Montrie would receive her, Rachel mounted the cracking little staircase with a feeling of truer affection for her old companion than she had ever felt before.

Her eyes were opened to her past conduct. Geoffrey Salter's words had opened them, and shown her how selfish and inconsiderate she had been, what a poor use she had made of the power her riches had bestowed upon her ; and she hastened forward to greet the old woman, wrapt up in flannels, in an arm-chair, and, to Miss Montrie's unmitigated astonishment, kissed her voluntarily upon the forehead.

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. CRANLEY'S MISTAKE.

"I AM so sorry," commenced Rachel, "to find that you are ill."

Her pretty bravery of beige and velvet made a powerful contrast to the lack of luxury in Miss Montrie's bedroom, but Rachel (for once) was thinking nothing of herself or her surroundings, as she looked into the drawn face of her old companion.

"Oh, Miss Montrie!" she continued, "I am afraid you must have suffered a great deal of pain."

But at first the old lady could not answer. She had been racked with pain, and wearied with the monotony of her life for weeks past; and the sudden and unexpected pleasure of seeing Miss Saltoun was too much for her. She held the hand which Rachel had extended between her trembling palms, whilst weak tears coursed down her cheeks.

"My dear young lady," she said at last, "how good it is of you—how very, very good—to think of me. And to come all this way to see me. It is too much condescension."

"No, don't say that! I ought to have come long ago, and indeed I would have come, had I known that you were ill. But Aunt Mary only told me of it to-day. I fancied, somehow, that you were comfortably settled in another engagement. How is it that you have been unemployed so long?"

"Ah! it's not so easy for a woman to find a situation, Miss Saltoun, when she is old and feeble. My sister-in-law was more than six years at Catherstone, you must remember, and that makes a difference at her time of life."

The speaker was the red-haired woman who had

remained in the room, leaning on the foot-rail of the bed.

"Hush! Amelia," said Miss Montrie; "that is no concern of Miss Saltoun. This is my brother's wife," she continued, for Rachel's benefit; "and she has been very kind in doing her best for me during this tiresome illness, but she has her house and her children to look after, and I am afraid I have been a great trouble to her."

"Well, a sick person can hardly be otherwise in a house like this, with only a girl to help; but you have been very patient, Emma, and given no more trouble than you could avoid. She has suffered dreadfully, Miss Saltoun, and we've been up with her, night and day, for a month past."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" repeated Rachel; "and how did it come on?"

"I caught cold," replied Miss Montrie, "as I was walking home one day, from keeping an appointment with a lady. I had to go to Hampstead, and when I arrived there, she had forgotten all about it, and gone out and left no message behind her. Then it came on to rain, and I got pretty well drenched before I caught an omnibus, and it brought on acute rheumatism. I was always subject to a touch of rheumatism in the autumn, you may remember, Miss Saltoun."

"It was rheumatic fever, the doctor said," interposed the sister-in-law; "and you would not have succumbed to it so easily, Emma, if you hadn't fretted yourself to skin and bone first."

"No, no, Amelia! I didn't fret!" replied the other, gently. "That would have been very ungrateful, when you and Robert were so kind to me."

"Who is your doctor?" asked Rachel, hurriedly, for she dreaded what further disclosures might be coming.

"He's a Mr. Bolton—the parish doctor for this district. A very able man, I'm told."

"But rheumatism and gout, and those sort of things, require a specialist, Miss Montrie. Has he done you any good? Are you better?"

"Oh, yes! I am much better! dear Miss Saltoun. A fortnight ago I could not stand."

"And it's as much as you can do to stand now," cried the sister-in-law; and she suffers dreadfully at night. What's the use of denying it, Emma, when Robert and I can hear your moans each time you move?"

"I know it's a little trying sometimes, Amelia, but why should we worry Miss Saltoun with talking of it? She's not used to hear stories of pain and poverty. Thank God! they're both far enough removed from her. Tell me something of yourself, my dear," continued Miss Montrie. "Are you quite well and happy, and is your new companion all that you can desire?"

Rachel laughed rather harshly as she replied,—

"Oh, I'm right enough, Miss Montier. We had an accident with the stables the other night; a portion of them caught fire, but, fortunately, none of the horses were injured, and the damage is not irretrievable."

"Oh, my dear! A fire? How terrible. Thank God you were not hurt," cried Miss Montrie, clasping her hands.

"Nobody was hurt, luckily; but one of the gentlemen burnt himself whilst helping to free the horses. It was Mr. Salter, the artist, who painted that lovely picture, 'The Birth of Spring,' which you admired so much in the Academy last season. He is decorating the panelled drawing-room, and I am working very hard under him. I am so anxious to improve in my drawing. I have been too idle lately."

"Oh, my dear Miss Saltoun, you always painted beautifully. Do you remember the sketch you took of me, with my poor old cat, Snow, on my lap, and the caricatures you made at Brighton? Amelia, just open that sandal-wood box on the dressing-table, and show them to Miss Saltoun; they will make her smile again."

And the red-haired woman placed a little packet of papers in Rachel's hand, in which she recognized various trumpery pen-and-ink sketches, which she had made and thrown away.

Was there another person in the world who would have hoarded them up and cherished them for her sake as this

faithful old watch-dog had done? The thought made a very unusual lump rise in Miss Saltoun's throat.

"What did you keep all this rubbish for, you foolish old woman!" she asked in an affectedly light tone.

"Oh, my dear, I hope you don't think it very foolish. But it was yours," was the reply; "and everything that reminds me of Catherstone is very precious to me."

"Well, I must try and find something better than this to remind you of it," said Rachel, rising; "and I won't let it be so long before I visit you again. By the way, I am going to send Dr. Osborne down to see you. He is considered to be particularly clever with rheumatism, you know, and will get you about again sooner than anybody else."

"I know he is clever, Miss Saltoun, and it is very good of you to wish me to see him," replied Miss Montrie, with a face of alarm; "only don't be offended, my dear, but I know how much his visits used to cost you, and I am obliged to be very careful and prudent now you see, lest I may be unable to resume my work this winter."

Rachel looked at the poor old woman, whose hands were twisted with the pain she had endured, and a great pity moved her for one who was so old and helpless, and dependent on herself for a living.

"Never mind Dr. Osborne's fees," she said, reddening the while, for she was not used to bestow her charities in person; "I shall be responsible for them, Miss Montrie, only make haste and get well before all the fine weather is gone."

And she flew down to her carriage without waiting to receive the thanks which both the women showered liberally upon her.

She returned home in radiant spirits; a little bird seemed singing in her heart. It was the first fruits of stooping to perform a benevolent action, although Rachel did not recognize it as such. She only knew that she felt unusually happy, but her satisfaction received a check before the morning was over. She and Kate Cranley spent it alone, and Mrs. Cranley was making rather a lamentation over a slender gold bangle, the gift of some

former admirer, which she always wore on her right wrist, but which was not to be found.

"I have searched in every possible place for it without success," she said in a voice of vexation. "It is most unaccountable; it has not been off my arm, night or day, for the last three years."

"Have you been out in the garden?" asked Rachel.

"No, dear Miss Saltoun; that is the mysterious part of it. I have been up in my own room the whole afternoon; I have not left the house."

"Then your bangle must be in the house," rejoined Miss Saltoun, calmly; and she rang the bell, and desired the servants to institute a thorough search for Mrs. Cranley's property.

They looked about for a long time, and declared they could not find it; but later in the evening a footman appeared with the missing trinket, folded in a piece of paper, and presented it to Kate Cranley.

"If you please, madam, the housekeeper says, will you look and see if this is your bracelet. The under-housemaid was in the drawing-room clearing up after Mr. Salter, and she found this against the wall, right behind Miss Saltoun's canvases."

Kate Cranley hastily unfolded the paper, and grew very red as she seized the bangle and thrust it on her arm.

"Yes, that is it, thank you," she replied, and turned away as if to dismiss the subject.

But Rachel had looked up from her book, and heard the servant's explanation.

"What is that, Mrs. Cranley?" she asked, as they were left together again. "How can your bangle have found its way into the painting-room, when you were sitting upstairs all the afternoon?"

"Well, I certainly *did* occupy my own room for the best part of the day," returned Mrs. Cranley, rather nervously; "but you know that you invited me, Miss Saltoun, to join you in your painting studies, so I just went down for a minute or two to see if there was really any skill left in these idle fingers of mine."

"You mean that you painted there."

"Oh, yes, I *did* paint a little. I hope there was no harm in my doing so?"

"*Harm!*" repeated Rachel Saltoun, with a curling lip. "What possible harm could there be in your doing what I do? Do you mean harm to yourself or to Mr. Salter? The only thing is that he agreed to direct my studies as an exceptional favor, and I should not like him to think I was imposing two pupils upon him instead of one."

Kate Cranley put on an affectation of modest alarm.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! I hope he did not think me presumptuous for setting up my easel on a line with yours. I should never have thought of such a thing if you had not been good enough to invite me. And now I am afraid you think I have done wrong."

"I wish you had waited until I was there to excuse your presence," said Rachel. "I certainly *did* invite you to draw with me, but that was before Mr. Salter had so generously offered to assist me in my work. Did you copy his panel and draw after him?"

"Well, I tried in my poor way to do so. Of course, I am well aware of the deficiencies of my attempt, but Mr. Salter was good enough to praise the design and general coloring."

"It must not occur again," said Rachel, with cool determination.

"I beg your pardon," replied Mrs. Cranley, as though she had not heard the words.

"I am afraid I must ask you to remove your easel to your own room again," repeated Rachel. "I promised Mr. Salter that he should have the drawing-room entirely to himself, and I should not have ventured to intrude upon him if he had not pressed me to do so."

"Oh! he *pressed* you!" interpolated Mrs. Cranley.

"And of course, I should have no objection to your joining us," continued Rachel, "without noticing her companion's remark, but for the reason I have given. Mr. Salter takes no pupils. He stated the fact so distinctly that it made me dubious of accepting his subsequent proposal. But if two of us were to take advantage

of it, it would look very much like encroaching on his kindness. Do you understand ? ”

“ Oh ! yes,” cried Mrs. Cranley, “ I perfectly understand. But if you had not expressly invited me——.”

And then she tossed her head, and turned away, and said no more.

Yes, Rachel *had* expressly invited her to do as she said ; she had told her that they would set up their easels side by side, and paint from the same subject. She remembered it perfectly, and, at the time, she had wished it ; and now she did not wish it.

That was all she was conscious of, but it was enough for her. She told herself that her obligations to Geoffrey Salter were already heavier than she could repay, and she would not incur another. Besides, she could see that he did not like Mrs. Cranley—that her style and manner were objectionable to him, as indeed they were sometimes to Rachel herself ; and she felt annoyed that there should have been any shuffling about it, and that her companion should have considered it worth her while to try and conceal the fact that she had been in the drawing-room.

Why should she try to conceal it ? What motive could she have had for seeking Mr. Salter’s presence, unless it were, as she affirmed, to try and learn from watching his artistic skill ? Then why had she taken the trouble to assure her that she had kept upstairs the entire afternoon ?

Miss Saltoun hated a falsehood, or a falsehood teller, beyond all description, and her undoubted prevarication made Kate Cranley sink very low in her estimation.

Rachel found herself thinking more than once during the evening that Miss Montrie, with all her stupidity, would never have been guilty of such a meanness. And for that very reason (so she told herself), her present companion should never be invited again to partake in any advantages beyond those which her position warranted. She encroached upon them.

She was not content with being introduced to society of her patroness’s friends, she wanted to share them with her—to share their kindnesses—their confidences—perhaps, their friendships.

At this idea Rachel drew herself up proudly. It was *un peu trop*. Mrs. Cranley might be her watch-dog, but she would not be her usurper. She was not going to give up her liberty. She was her own mistress, and would continue so.

And thus thinking, she worked herself up into a species of antagonism against Mrs. Cranley, that, had it been analyzed, would have looked very much like resentment, because her companion had made an attempt to share Mr. Salter's attentions with her.

She walked into the painting-room upon the following morning with an apology to the artist upon her lips.

"I hear," she commenced, "that Mrs. Cranley had the impertinence to come into the drawing-room during my absence yesterday, and attempt to paint under your supervision. I trust you don't think she had my authority for doing so, Mr. Salter. I was astonished when I heard of her presumption."

"Isn't that rather a hard name to call it by?" asked Geoffrey, smiling. "She really draws very well. I was quite surprised at the accuracy of her sketching."

"Oh, that is not the question at all," said Rachel, somewhat annoyed by the pleasant way he took it. "She might be an Angelica Kauffman, but that gives her no right to intrude upon you. It is bad enough to have burdened you with one pupil!"

"Mrs. Cranley did not say a word about being my pupil. I think she only brought her easel here for the benefit of the light. If I gave her any hints, they were entirely spontaneous."

"Well, she doesn't come here again," replied Rachel, tartly; "and I have told her so, plainly. Should she presume to disobey me, it will be at her own risk. I keep no one near me who disregards my wishes."

"You are an autocrat," said Geoffrey, carelessly.

"I am my own mistress, Mr. Salter."

"So I heard you say before. I am not sure if you intend it for a boast or an appeal for indulgence. Which is it?"

"I don't understand you."

"No? I mean, that I should not consider the position an entirely enviable one myself. There is a higher happiness in this world than being one's own mistress."

"What is that?"

"Being the mistress of a nobler nature than yours. To reign over a greater mind—to be its queen—its ideal. To sway its thought, and influence its action—and all because of its great affection for your virtues and yourself. Is not that better than to be simply independent?"

"Cannot one have both?" said Rachel.

"Oh, no. Love is always dependent. It ties itself. It nominates its master, and glories in its bondage."

"Then I thank heaven I know nothing about it!" cried Rachel. "I should hate to be tied! And what has all this to do with my companion intruding her presence in my drawing-room?"

"Nothing, I am afraid, only, it led to it. I think you are a little hard on Mrs. Cranley, as you were a little hard upon Miss Montrie. You will never get perfection, you know, if you go on changing all your life long."

"You admire Kate Cranley," said Miss Saltoun, jealously.

"Indeed, I don't. She is good-looking, but she is not at all the sort of woman I admire. My artistic proclivities raise me much higher than that. She is too artificial to please me. But she can paint."

"Better than I can?" asked Rachel.

"Yes, at the present moment. Not better than you will be able to paint, if you will persevere, and take pains. When I leave you, you must put yourself under some good master, who will make you work. Then, some day, you will succeed."

Rachel bent over her easel, and answered nothing.

The sky was dull and lowering that morning. Everything seemed going wrong.

CHAPTER XVII.

UNACCOUNTABLE TEARS.

KATE CRANLEY had obtained leave to go to London. Miss Saltoun was very generous in that respect, and gave her a holiday whenever she demanded it. And Kate had come to ask for it pretty often of late. She enjoyed her little visits to her old haunts. The season was over, it was true, but that fact made Catherstone all the duller in her estimation. She took no pleasure in the changing glory of the leaves—the clear, bright stillness of an autumn evening held no delight for her. She trod the paths in the beautiful grounds of Catherstone sadly, and often wished she had the courage to return to the old Bohemian life which, notwithstanding all its privations and its penalties, gleamed so brightly in the background. But when she had leave of absence for an afternoon, she forgot all her regrets.

London was empty or what is called so. The fashionable and the wealthy were off to Wiesbaden, or Homburg, to the moors or the river, for change and pastime. But many remained, and, amongst them, most of Kate Cranley's old friends, who had not been generally either rich or fashionable. Above all, the Duke was there. He never left town on his own account, and his autumnal invitations were not yet due. So he lingered on in his chambers in Pall Mall, and continued to be very curious concerning his grand-daughter and her intentions. Kate had promised to see him, and give him all the news on a certain day in September; and, as she stepped out of the train at Waterloo, she looked more than usually fascinating.

She was dressed far better than she used to be, for Miss Saltoun had advanced her salary for the purpose. Her costume was of black canvas cloth, much trimmed with

Maltese lace, and her bonnet was a triumph of French art, composed entirely of yellow roses, which set off to perfection her dark hair and glowing eyes. As she left the railway carriage, a tall, fair man took her gloved hand in his own.

"Well, Kate!" he exclaimed; "how are you? Blooming as ever, I see. Catherstone doesn't seem to disagree with you, though it is so dull."

"Oh, Charlie! it is worse than ever. Miss Saltoun has had the 'hump' lately, and is quite disagreeable. But never mind her. What are we going to do with ourselves this lovely afternoon?"

"That depends on your majesty. What are your own plans?"

"I have none, except to enjoy myself. Only, before I return, I must run in for a minute, and see the old Duke. I promised him faithfully to do so."

"Bother the Duke! Can't I have you to myself for a few hours?"

"Charlie, I must. It is important. He wants to ask me something about Miss Saltoun."

"Nothing between you and that tottering old edifice, eh? Honor bright."

"Oh, Charlie! what nonsense," cried Kate, as she glanced up at her handsome escort. "As if there could be? Why! he's over seventy. But he feels anxious about his grand-daughter. She is very *entêtée*, and he lives in dread of making a scandal. So he likes to hear all that is going on at Catherstone."

"And you are his go-between, eh, Kate? What does he give you for the job?" inquired her admirer, rather coarsely. But that was the weak point in Mrs. Cranley's character. She didn't see the coarseness, or she didn't mind it—one of the two.

"Give me," she reiterated. "Stingy old thing! I wish he would give me something. He's always promising to do so, but I have never seen it yet."

"Is his Grace a bachelor?"

"No! but he's next best. He's a widower."

"Couldn't you get hold of the ducal coronet, Kate?"

"Oh, Charlie! I wish I could. But after all, I'm not sure that it would be much good, for he's not rich. I'd rather have a brewer with lots of money. I'm pretty well sick of poverty and dependence."

"Poor little girl. Well, we won't talk of such nasty things to-day. What time are you due at the old boy's?"

"Between six and half-past."

"Well, come along, and let's 'do' a *matinée* first. We shall be just in time. Then I will drop you at the duke's for half-an-hour, and we'll have dinner at the Criterion, before you go home. Will that do?"

"Oh, charmingly, Charlie! You are the dearest boy to spend an afternoon with that I know. It will be quite too delightful! No chance of meeting madame, I suppose?"

"Trust me for that, Kate. She's up in Edinburgh, with her parents. And I ought to be there too, only business detained me in town. Luckily, I ought to add, and I do, you little charmer," said the man, as he placed her in a hansom, and, sitting down beside her, possessed himself of her hand.

She left it in his clasp complacently, and drove on with him, happy and smiling, and without suffering the least pang of conscience at the thought that her companion was a married man, and his wife was in Edinburgh.

And yet Kate Cranley was not a wicked woman. She was only acting as the majority of her sex act in the nineteenth century, when it seems to add a little *sauce piquante* to the dish, if their admirers are married men, and every delightful little jaunt runs the risk of being found out, and followed by the excitement of an *esclandre*.

Captain Eversfield was not the least bit in love with Kate Cranley, nor she with him. The worst that had ever passed between them was a kiss, but, in *her* phraseology, he was a darling, and she didn't see why that booby of a wife of his should monopolize his society; and in *his*, Kate Cranley was a deuced good little woman, and just the right sort, and he'd rather take her to the theatre than any girl he knew.

And so they went to the Gaiety, and enjoyed it thoroughly, and tried to feel sentimentally towards each other;

and when the play was over, Captain Eversfield drove Kate down to the Duke's chambers in Pall Mall, and, having ascertained the old man was at home, dropped her there, with a promise to return in half-an-hour.

"But don't drive up to the door, Charlie," she pleaded; "the old boy's rather suspicious, you know, and it might spoil all my chances if he caught sight of you. Be at the bottom of St. James Street at a quarter to seven, and I'll join you there."

"All right, Kitty," cried the Captain, as he lounged off in the direction of his own club.

Mrs. Cranley tripped up the staircase, and touched the bell at the Duke's door. It was answered by his Grace's own man, who evidently was used to lady visitors, by the nonchalance with which he received her.

"His Grace is in?" she inquired.

"Yes, madam—Mrs. Cranley, I believe? You will find his Grace in the sitting-room."

The next minute she was in his presence. The old lord was looking older than usual; he had caught a bad cold, and every part of his face that was not yellow had turned purple.

"Well, my dear," he sniffed, "any news?"

"Very serious news, your Grace," replied Mrs. Cranley, "or so it seems to me. Mr. Salter continues at Catherstone, and I have been forbidden to enter the room where they paint together."

"Dear, dear! that looks very bad. How long has this young man been at Catherstone now?"

"Let me see," said Kate musingly; "he came the middle of July, you may remember, and it is now the beginning of September. Six weeks. And there are still two panels to be filled."

"He appears to work very slowly."

"Oh! they prefer to work slowly. He seems to do next to nothing, to me. They are together all day, either out of doors or in, and Miss Saltoun's sole object seems to be to get rid of me. Of course that is not *my* business; but your Grace can judge how far it may be yours."

"And you have tried your blandishments on this fellow

Salter, and failed ! That seems incredible to me, with such a little rogue as you are," cried the old man, waggishly, as he fumbled over her hand.

" Ah ! your Grace, if a man's fancy is once caught elsewhere, Venus Aphrodite herself would have no effect upon him. I have certainly tried to make friends with Mr. Salter, and, perhaps, I might have succeeded, if Miss Saltoun had not forbidden me access to his presence. She is jealous of anyone speaking to him but herself."

" But couldn't you compromise him with her, my dear ? Ray is a proud girl, and would never forgive a breach of propriety in anyone, male or female. Cannot you contrive to be seen with him out of Catherstone—at his inn, or in any lonely place ; never mind if it is with his consent or against it, so that it disgusts her with him ? "

" You don't think of my *character*, Duke," said Kate Cranley, grandly.

" Oh, yes, I do," giggled the old sinner, " and a very nice little character it is too. But I don't suppose that a flirtation, more or less, will harm it, eh, Kitty ? "

" That depends, your Grace. I may lose caste in the eyes of my friends. By philandering with Mr. Geoffrey Salter (or pretending to do so) I might lose the chance of making a good marriage. What is to compensate me for that ? Mr. Salter has evidently no mind to do so."

" Is there anyone on hand, my dear ? " inquired the old man, grinning at her.

Kate Cranley bridled.

" I may not have decided on a choice, your Grace, but more than one gentleman has insinuated his wishes to me."

" More than one fly buzzing round the little honey-pot," said Craig-Morris. " Well, I don't wonder at it. And so you can't make up your mind, Kitty ? "

" I didn't say that, your Grace. I may be compelled to make up my mind, by-and-bye, from sheer need of protection ; but, at present, I know no one in that capacity who is exactly to my taste. I should like," said Kate, with a deep-drawn sigh, " to marry a man much older than myself, to whom I could look up and be a solace and a comfort."

"An old fellow like me, eh, Kitty?" said the Duke laughing.

"Oh, your Grace, pray do not jest on such a subject; it would be the grossest presumption on my part to raise my eyes so high. Indeed—indeed, whatever I may feel, I have never dared to let my thoughts dwell upon it."

The old man glanced at her keenly from beneath his shaggy eyebrows. He had made the suggestion as a joke, but he saw that she was professing to take it in earnest. It was time to change the subject.

"Come, come, we've no more time for nonsense," he said as he rose and hobbled to the other side of the room. "You're a good little girl, Kitty, and I'm going to give you something. I was looking over my late wife's jewels the other day, and I thought this was just the sort of trinket that would suit you."

He held up an old-fashioned necklace as he spoke, composed of large yellow topazes, set as pendants. It was not a very valuable ornament, but it was handsome and brilliant looking, and it took Kate Cranley's fancy immensely.

"Oh, your Grace!" she ejaculated, with delight pictured in her radiant countenance.

"D'ye like it? d'ye like it?" said the old man, as he placed it in her hand. "Well, then, take it and wear it, Kitty, and don't lose it, for I haven't another to give you. It was a favorite of the late Duchess. I have often seen it on her neck; but it will look better on yours, you puss."

Kate took the necklace, and pressed her lips upon the Duke's wrinkled hand.

"How can I thank your Grace?" she murmured.

"Oh, I want you to do something for me in return: it's only a little payment in advance, my dear," he replied. "You must positively wean Rachel's thoughts from that man Salter. We don't want all her money to go out of the family, you see. We want her to marry a rich man—someone like Lord Vivian—so that her marriage settlements may in some measure rectify the injustice of her late father's will. His property, at least, should come back to his brothers and sisters. A rich man wouldn't object to this,

but a poor one would want it all for himself and children. Besides, Rachel couldn't marry an artist; it would be a disgrace. No one of her family would speak to her again. She would become a pariah—an outcast. You must prevent it at all hazards."

"I will do my best, your Grace."

"That's a good girl; I was sure you would say so. Attack the man boldly; make regular love to him. No one could resist you long with those wicked eyes. Come, confess if you haven't half-a-dozen at your feet at the present moment."

"Oh, fie, your Grace! You are making me out quite a flirt," cried Kate Cranley.

"Well, whatever I did, I couldn't make you other than a very pretty woman, and I only wish I could keep you here all the evening; but it's nearly dinner time, my dear, and I must dress for my club. So wish me good-bye and go. Are you returning to Catherstone at once?"

"In an hour or so, your Grace."

"Ah! There's a man waiting for you outside. It's no good blushing, or taking the trouble to deny it. I knew it from the first. Well, don't keep him waiting any longer, and let me have a line next week to say how you are getting on with the affair at Catherstone."

And away hobbled the Duke in his furry dressing-gown, to his bed-chamber, there to be arrayed by Evans for his club dinner.

Kate slipped the necklace into her bosom, and ran down to meet Captain Eversfield, to whom she gave a very garbled statement of her interview with the old man. The trinket lay concealed in her bosom, and the name of Salter in her heart. She was not such a fool as to tell one admirer that she had accepted an equivalent for bringing another to her feet.

When she returned to Catherstone, she found Rachel sitting quietly by herself, and apparently engaged in study. She made a few kindly inquiries as to how her companion had enjoyed her trip to London, and then she returned to dreaming over her book. She appeared to be reading, but Mrs. Cranley was sure she was dreaming, from the

droop of her eyelid, and the half smile that flickered round her mouth. Dreaming, too, of something pleasant, softening and alluring. And so Rachel was.

She had now been for six weeks in daily intercourse with Geoffrey Salter, and her character was changing beneath the influence of his. His opinions and beliefs, the tone of his thoughts, were so much above anything she had been in the habit of listening to, that they had first humiliated and then raised her. His extreme rectitude, his fearless disregard of the world's verdict, and his unblenching truth, which was carried down to the merest detail, had inspired her mind (which was really great and noble as his own) with the deepest admiration, and at last the conviction seemed to have burst upon her that he was right, and the Bible was right, and Christianity was a sublime truism, and Heaven a reality.

Little by little, Geoffrey Salter's words and remarks, without having any apparent design in them, and quite unconsciously to himself, who only spoke to her as he did to everyone else, had brushed away the filmy veil of Materialism which had stood between Rachel Saltoun and all good things, and caused her to return to the creed of her happy childhood, and once more to believe in the existence of God. And it was this that was making her feel so dreamily calm and comfortable on that particular evening. She felt that she believed again, that the fog which had obscured her reasoning powers had cleared away, and that everything she valued and enjoyed—her health and youth and powers—were so many gifts from a Father's hand. Geoffrey Salter had led her to look "from Nature up to Nature's God"—at how much cost to himself he had not yet stopped to consider.

So Rachel was blissfully content, and ready to bless the hand that had made her so. What a friend he had been to her, in every sense of the word. She had never acknowledged it to him—hardly even to herself—but she felt it, in the very depths of her heart.

She was standing before her easel the following morning, comparing the canvas on it with the half-finished panel she was copying, when Mr. Salter entered the room.

"I'm glad you feel so industrious," he said, when the first greetings had passed between them, "for we must work in double quick time this week. I want to finish my work here by Saturday. I have arranged to start by the Sunday boat, with a friend, for Italy. So I must just rub in the farm well with the old willow, as quickly as possible."

Rachel lifted her eyes, and regarded him.

"Next Saturday," she repeated, slowly.

"Yes! next Saturday," he said, briskly, as if in contrast. Don't you think I can do it? Do you challenge me to the deed? My time here is nearly up, you know, Miss Saltoun. Indeed, I should have finished these panels sooner. I am afraid I have been rather bent on doing the *dolce far niente* down at Catherstone. And now it is time I should go. It is best I should go," he added, in a lower tone.

"And I shall have no more painting lessons," said Rachel, with a sigh, as she took her palette and mahlstick in her hand.

"Not from me, perhaps. But there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it," replied Geoffrey, turning away from her; "and you have vastly improved. Anyone could take you in hand now."

"Do you really think I am improved, Mr. Salter?"

"I never say what I do not mean, Miss Saltoun. You are not only greatly improved, but you have developed a talent, which at first, I confess, I did not think that you possessed. If you will be patient and persevere, you may have your pictures in the Academy some day. You are an artist. I cannot give you higher praise."

"Thank you," replied the girl in a low voice.

At that juncture a servant entered, with a note and a parasol.

"These were left for you, madam, by a gentleman. He says you dropped the parasol in Miss Montrie's room, when you called on her. He would have returned it before, but had not the leisure to walk over. The note is from Miss Montrie, madame, and the gentleman says, Dr. Osborne has done her a deal of good."

"Thank you, James," said Rachel, reddening violently, as she took the note; "give the parasol to Mears, and tell her to put it away."

Geoffrey, who had overheard the conversation, turned round, and regarded Rachel intently.

She lifted her eyes, and, meeting his, laughed consciously.

"You have been to call upon Miss Montrie?" he said.

"Oh, yes; long ago. The poor old thing has been very bad with rheumatism."

"And you sent your own doctor to see her?"

"Dr. Osborne had attended her whilst here, you know," replied Rachel, hesitatingly, "and I thought he would understand her constitution better than a stranger."

The young man looked at her for a few moments in silence; and then, with the words, "You are a true woman," he returned to his work.

"Mr. Salter," said Rachel, after a pause, "since we are to part so soon, there is something I should like to tell you before you go."

"What is that, Miss Saltoun?"

"You are so good, I think it will please you to know that I am not half so uncertain in my mind, so perplexed, as I used to be, I think it must be half due to your beautiful picture, and half to yourself. You are so like your paintings. I am unable to separate the two—both so pure and true—so full of Nature and of God. And you have made me see how foolish, and self-opinionated, and faithless I have been, ever to doubt in the existence of a future."

"Has the doubt quite passed?" he said, joyfully.

"I *think* it has. Yes, I am *sure* it has. And I feel as if some heavy load had been lifted off my shoulders. I was very unhappy, Mr. Salter, though I never told anyone so. I felt so much alone."

"I am sure you must."

"And now——" commenced Rachel.

"Now, you will never feel lonely again."

"I hope not," she answered, sadly.

The artist turned again, and regarded her kindly.

"You are not quite well to-day," he said. "Don't you think it would be wise to give up work, and go into the fresh air? It is impossible to paint well with distracted thoughts."

"I will take your advice, for I do not feel well," replied Rachel, as she laid away her canvas and left the room.

But when she had penetrated the depths of the shrubberies, and sat down upon a rustic seat, some feeling, to which she could not give a name—some sense of bitter disappointment or bereavement—so overcame her, that without rhyme or reason, she burst into a flood of tears.

Who, that had known the proud and high-born Rachel Saltoun, could possibly have believed, that she could be weeping like any ordinary woman, because the artist she had made her friend was about to leave the house—feeling as if she had been leaning on a stout support that was suddenly withdrawn from her—and she was to be left alone and comfortless?"

She did not recognize the meaning of her tears. She would have felt like throwing herself into "Ophelia's Pool" had she guessed a particle of the bitter truth.

But still the fact remained, that, notwithstanding all her wealth and luxury, and the beautiful belief that had come to her, the Honorable Rachel Saltoun continued to be dejected and out of sorts for the remainder of the day.

CHAPTERX XVIII.

THE POISONED ARROW.

KATE CRANLEY was not slow to perceive the change in Miss Saltoun's disposition ; she saw that she was more subdued, more silent, and less haughty than usual, as though, at the approach of sorrow, the sense of her humanity made her long to lean upon her fellow-creatures.

And Kate Cranley did more than note the change. She rightly guessed the cause. Her woman's wit led her to conclude that Miss Saltoun had suddenly awakened to a consciousness of the danger she had dallied with, and shrunk back appalled at the gulf she might have fallen into.

This was the time, thought her companion, to render the gulf impassable. If Rachel contemplated it too long in its present condition—if she commenced to measure its length, and depth, and breadth, she might argue herself to the conclusion that it was not so bad as it had been represented to her, and that, having the courage to cross it, she would find more pleasure than pain upon the other side.

Kate looked at the glittering necklace that lay on its velvet bed in her trinket-box, and resolved to make a bold dash for earning it on the first possible occasion.

It was now September, and the autumn evening, though warm as summer, began to close in early. Geoffrey Salter was obliged to use artificial light for his work after five o'clock, and Rachel, who had been painting very indifferently all day, felt the atmosphere of the room too close and enervating, and put by her canvas and easel. A few minutes later Kate Cranley met her on the staircase with her garden hat on.

"Going for a stroll, Miss Saltoun?" she inquired sweetly.

"Only on the terrace," replied Rachel. "My head aches with the smell of the oil paints and the gas, and I want to be alone and think out my subject for to-morrow."

"*On the terrace!*" repeated Mrs. Cranley to herself, as the graceful figure of Miss Saltoun passed out into the dusk. "Yes, I understand what that means. On the terrace in the dark, watching your dear artist working in the light, without his suspecting it, or anybody else, except yours to command. You shall have something for your pains to-night, Miss Saltoun—a pretty little peep-show to amuse you from the terrace. For this is the time, and no mistake, to carry out the Duke's little plan."

She ran upstairs for one moment first to rearrange her toilet, and put a dash of powder on her face, and before she came down again she leaned from her bedroom window, and watched Rachel's tall figure as she walked from end to end of the terrace beneath, turning her eyes each time she came opposite the uncurtained drawing-room windows, on the figure of Geoffrey Salter, standing with his palette in his hand, and painting the lower part of the panel.

"That's all right," thought Kate Cranley, as she slipped quietly downstairs again, and entered the painting-room.

She had no fear of interruption. Miss Saltoun's pride would prevent her making a "scene" at the moment, whatever she might say about the matter afterwards. Doubtless, she would be angry, but Kate had an excuse already manufactured for that emergency. After all, she was as free to accept the attentions of any eligible man as the heiress herself, and there was no sin in a little flirtation. But, if Miss Saltoun could be persuaded that the attraction was mutual, it was an offence which Mrs. Cranley felt she would never pardon, at all events, on the artist's side.

She entered the room softly but confidently; all pretty women are to a certain extent bold; they are so well aware of their strength. And Kate Cranley's talent in that direction had not been folded away and laid in a napkin, but was in full working power. She walked close up to Geoffrey Salter's side, and placed one hand upon his shoulder.

"You here!" he said, with a quick backward glance
"Be careful! You are shaking my hand!"

But Kate only clasped her other hand over the first, and murmured,—

"Won't you leave off work for a few minutes just to talk to me? Miss Saltoun monopolizes you so completely, I never see anything of you."

"Why don't you come and paint with us?" he asked, with a movement of the shoulder she leaned on, as if to jerk her off.

"She won't let me," said Kate, pouting out her red lips.
"She forbids my coming here again. I think she's afraid I shall fall in love with you, Mr. Salter."

"What nonsense!" cried Geoffrey. "You talk of love as if it were a mushroom, to spring up in a moment for anybody, or everybody. Love has to be built up, brick by brick, like a solid edifice. It is not a butterfly, to be born one hour and die the next. Do take your hands off my shoulder, Mrs. Cranley."

"No, I won't!" she replied, resting her chin upon her hands. "I want you to turn your head and look at me."

"That's easily done," he said, laughing, as he turned his face towards her, and his cheek came in contact with hers.

Mrs. Cranley kissed it, unblushingly, and the young man laughed again and returned to his painting.

"Now! that's quite enough for one while," he exclaimed, "and I really cannot spare you another moment. I am working at railroad speed to get this finished by Saturday."

"And you don't love me one little bit," sighed Kate, sentimentally.

"Not one little bit," he echoed. "And I really wish you would go. I can work twice as well alone."

"Give me another kiss, then!"

"I haven't given you *one* yet, Mrs. Cranley. I think it was you who kissed me."

"Well, I shall kiss you again."

"Indeed, you won't!" he exclaimed, dodging his handsome head.

"You wretch," cried Kate, gayly, "I don't believe you're a man; you're only a piece of marble, that some lady sculptor has prayed into life."

"Yes, that's it!" he replied, taking the whole business as a vulgar joke. He had seen from the first that Mrs. Cranley was rather "fast" and this sort of romping flirtation was the very thing he expected from her. But though pure-minded, he was no prude, and did not consider it worth his while to show offence.

"Are you going?" he demanded, presently. "Miss Saltoun may come in and catch you here, and then she will be angry."

"I'll go, if you'll give me another kiss."

"I have no more with me. I left them all at home," he answered.

"How *unkind* you are. There's not another man in the world would refuse me. And I do like you *so* much—Geoffrey."

"Do you? That's awfully good of you. I wish I could reciprocate the sentiment. But I have only one love, and she smells painfully of oil."

"It wouldn't hurt you to kiss me, that I can see," continued Kate, in an aggrieved tone.

"Oh Mrs. Cranley, please don't talk any more rubbish," said Geoffrey, impatiently.

"I am really pressed for time. And you had better go. You have no possible excuse for remaining here."

"Well, I shall have my kiss first," cried Kate Cranley, as she deliberately pulled down his face to hers and kissed him on the lips. Geoffrey shook himself free, with a gesture of disgust. It was not the kiss that disgusted him, but the woman.

That anyone, who valued her reputation, or had any sense of propriety, could deliberately attack a man, who told her plainly that he wanted none of her, was inexplicable to him. He regarded it as a jest, but it was a jest that offended his dignity. So he said, quite crossly:

"Well! now you've had your way, be off, please, for I don't want to see any more of you."

But Kate took it all in good part.

"Cross boy!" she exclaimed, merrily; "if ever I catch you alone again, I'll make you pay for this. Good-night, Mr. Ice and Snow." And with that, she rushed out into the hall. The deed was done. The question remained, if it had been successful—if Miss Saltoun had watched it from the terrace, and mistaken the feelings that accompanied it?

One of these queries might have been answered in the affirmative. Rachel *had* seen it all, and the sight had nearly paralyzed her. She had just been opposite the drawing-room window as Mrs. Cranley entered on the scene, and had watched the (apparently) voluntary inclination of Mr. Salter's head, as he received her first caress.

And then the badinage that followed appeared to be quite amicable, viewed from without, and the second kiss though wrested by force, looked like the bantering play of two people who perfectly understood each other.

And as the girl watched them until Kate Cranley's laughing exit, her heart sank within her. She had thought him so pure, so high-souled, and so unapproachable; and here he had been carrying on, what, at the best, must be a senseless flirtation, with her companion.

Rachel remembered how Mr. Salter had pleaded for Mrs. Cranley, when she apologized for taking her easel into the drawing-room. Of course, she understood it now. He had wanted Kate to be there, had probably invited her to join them; and she had been foolish enough to think he would consider it a presumption. It was no business of hers (said Rachel, with a swelling bosom) who Mr. Geoffrey Salter favored or did not favor. But Mrs. Cranley was her companion, and whilst she remained at Catherstone she must give up all such unseemly actions, whether they were committed in jest or not.

Rachel went up to her own room after that, and came down to dinner so stiff and stately, that wicked Kate Cranley guessed at once that her *ruse* had succeeded, so she made herself ready for what was to follow, and accompanied her employer to the library, when the meal was concluded, the very embodiment of injured innocence, and looking as if butter would not melt in her mouth.

"Mrs. Cranley," commenced Rachel, as soon as they were freed from the supervision of the servants, "I should like to say a few words to you."

"Yes, dear Miss Saltoun."

"I was walking on the terrace this evening, and I saw (I could not help seeing) what—what took place between Mr. Salter and yourself.—I don't wish to appear harsh, but it is not the—the sort of thing I can countenance, or that is likely to redound to the credit of Catherstone; and, therefore, as you will resent my speaking of it, perhaps you had better look out for some situation where such—such things are permitted and approved of."

Rachel spoke with great difficulty. She was trying very hard to be dignified and indifferent, and to fight, at the same time, with the sob that would keep rising in her throat. Clever Kate Cranley read her discomfiture, and knew that her triumph was complete. Perhaps it might even mean another necklace from the Duke.

"I am very sorry, Miss Saltoun, if I have offended you," she commenced, in a meek voice. "Of course, I thought that I and Geoffrey—I mean Mr. Salter—were alone. I am not in the habit of practising such familiarities in public; but if you imagine there was any wrong in them, you are mistaken."

"May I ask," said Rachel coldly, "by what right you speak of Mr. Salter by his proper name?"

Kate elevated her dark brows.

"By what right, Miss Saltoun? Mr. Salter is not a married man."

"And, therefore, you would say, free to marry you?"

"Certainly. I do say it."

"Are you engaged to be married to him then, Mrs. Cranley?"

Kate cast down her eyes.

"I think you are pressing me rather hard," she said; "harder than even your privileges as my patroness extend. There are interims, as you must allow, between familiar intercourse and an engagement to marry. I have not made up my mind yet."

"Then, Mr. Salter has asked you to marry him—

has given you the opportunity to make up your mind?"

"Am I to betray his secrets, or my own?" asked Kate Cranley. "All I want you to understand, Miss Saltoun, is, that there was no impropriety in what you saw take place between us."

"That is according to opinion," replied Rachel, "and such a state of things appears, to me at least, peculiar, before you have (as you say) made up your mind. Under the circumstances, however, I withdraw my notice to you; but I trust you will conduct yourself more prudently for the future—hold your hand, in fact, until you have made up your mind. It strikes me that it would be more womanly and more refined."

And Rachel Saltoun bent her eyes deliberately on her book and hardly raised them again for the rest of the evening but Mrs. Cranley saw that the arrow had gone home, and that the poisoned barb had already commenced to rankle.

CHAPTER XIX.

A REVELATION.

RACHEL SALTOUN never closed her eyes that night, but lay awake in the darkness, brooding over what she had heard. She was unaccountably distressed by it; it covered her with a species of shame. She felt that she had gone out of her way to make Geoffrey Salter her friend. She had waived the question of his inferiority of birth and station, and had overruled all his own objections to a closer intercourse, in admiration of his superlative genius. And it had been all for nothing. She could not think of him as a friend, with Kate Cranley as his wife or *fiancée*. She did not reason why.

She had made Mrs. Cranley her own companion, and doubtless she was more than fitted by birth and education to become Mrs. Geoffrey Salter.

But Rachel could not imagine her in that position without pulling down all the romance she had commenced to weave about the artist's head. He and she were so sympathetic in their tastes and ideas. He had opened her eyes to so much that was beautiful in Art and Nature, and which she had never seen before. And he had raised her soul out of the morass of Materialism which had threatened to engulf it. And now he was going to be Kate Cranley's husband, and all their friendship was over. She might continue her acquaintance with them both—but friendship, never!

If he had only chosen an intellectual and spiritually-minded woman (so Rachel told herself), one who could sympathize with his disappointments, and glory in his success she could have congratulated him on his good fortune. But Mrs. Cranley, who cared for nothing so much as for her personal adornment, and whom Rachel had begun to

fear, deserved but too well the opprobrium she had gained for being "fast"—what sort of a helpmate would she prove for Geoffrey Salter? What can he have been thinking of to ask her to share his life? She painted well, it was true. Mr. Salter had praised her skill highly, but she could not really care for Art, or she would pursue it more diligently.

It was the greatest puzzle Rachel had ever known, and she lay on her bed, sighing and thinking over it, until the morning light. Her first impulse was not to paint that day. She had suddenly grown sick of painting. She would finish her panels after Mr. Salter had departed. But, on second thoughts, she feared the comments such an unusual proceeding might provoke, and resolved to go on as if nothing had occurred to vex her.

She saluted the artist very coldly and gravely, however, on meeting, and sat down to her work in silence.

Geoffrey also did not seem in his usual spirits that day. Perhaps the thought that his visit to Catherstone would so soon draw to a close had some influence over him, but he was moody and depressed. Never a voluble speaker, Miss Saltoun's gloomy manner completely tied his tongue, and for the first half-hour hardly a syllable passed between them, except such as related to their occupation. Then Geoffrey Salter saw Rachel's gray eyes, very sad and serious in their expression, wander listlessly two or three times from his painting to her copy, as if she did not quite know how to proceed with it; and, leaving his own work, he came and stood behind hers.

"Are you in any difficulty, Miss Saltoun? Can I assist you?" he asked.

"I don't think so. It is wrong altogether. I am in no humor for working this morning."

"You are not, indeed. That foreground is simply *nowhere*. You must paint it out, Miss Saltoun."

He took her brush from her as he spoke, and in doing so, his hand touched hers. The contact seemed to madden Rachel Saltoun. She seized her brush again, and flung a great splash of yellow ochre right across her sky.

"I will paint it *all* out," she exclaimed, passionately, as she jumped up from her seat. "I am sick of the whole

concern. I wish—I wish—I had never thought of having these panels done. Oh! it was unpardonable—indecent! I have been insulted under my own roof!"

She was pacing up and down the room now with rapid strides, her slight figure swaying from side to side as she walked, whilst Geoffrey Salter regarded her with unmitigated surprise.

"What is indecent? Who has insulted you, Miss Saltoun?" he asked.

"You have. You and Mrs. Cranley. Oh, I have no right to speak of you, I know. You are a stranger here, and can do as you like. But she, who is at Catherstone in the capacity of my chaperon and adviser—she might have had a little more consideration for my dignity, and the position she holds here."

"You have not yet done me the honor to tell me to what you allude," said Geoffrey Salter.

Rachel veered round and confronted him.

"You know as well as I do. It was last night, when Mrs. Cranley was with you here. I was on the terrace, and the room was lighted. I am not a spy, but I could not help seeing. That was the worst of it—the openness, the publicity—any of my servants might have seen the same; and it was disgraceful. I saw it all." She was panting with her passion and her excitement, but Mr. Salter remained perfectly cool.

"Pardon me," he said, as Rachel stopped and glared at him, "but I do not think you did see all."

"Was there more then? Is it worse than I thought it? Is this another insult?" she cried, indignantly.

"You are accusing me altogether wrongfully," he replied, quietly; "but it is impossible for me to answer you, or to justify myself, whilst you remain in this condition."

And he turned back to the easel, and having picked up her palette, mahl-stick, and brushes, commenced to rectify the yellow streak across her sky. His coolness made Rachel a thousand times worse.

"Do you mean to deny," she panted, "that you kissed Mrs. Cranley in this room last night?"

"I have to learn first that I am called upon to deny anything, Miss Saltoun."

"But, at least, you will admit that when you are in a lady's house, you should behave like a gentleman, even—even——"

"Even if I am not one, you would say," he interposed, quietly.

"No, no, I did not mean that ; but whatever your relations with Mrs. Cranley may be, this was an outrage upon common decency."

"Do you imagine I have any relations with her, then ?"

"You should have, after what I saw take place between you."

"I have not, all the same."

"Are you not engaged to her ?"

"No."

"Nor going to be ?"

"No."

"Nor in love with her ?"

"No," repeated Geoffrey, putting in his touches of cobalt, with his head held critically on one side, and as if his whole interest were centred in her damaged sky.

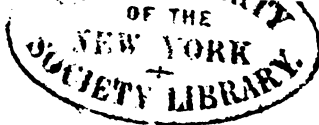
"Why did you kiss her then ?" demanded Rachel, with eyes wide open with surprise.

"Ah, you must ask her that."

"But I have asked her, and she led me to suppose that you were going to marry her."

"She misled you, I am afraid. Come, Miss Saltoun, let us end this farce. You have placed me in a difficult position, because, as a man, I can hardly tell you the whole circumstances as they occurred ; but, as my hostess and my employer, I feel that some explanation is due to you. Will you be content with this ? that nothing you may have seen take place last night, was by my invitation or with my consent, and that Mrs. Cranley is, at this moment, the very last woman in the world, perhaps, that I ever wish to see again."

Rachel stared at his back (for he had not turned to look at her whilst speaking) for a few seconds in silence, and then, flinging herself on a sofa, she burst into a flood of tears.



"Oh, what a fool I have made of myself," she sobbed ;
"what an utter, utter fool. What must you think of me?"

He laid down his brushes and palette, and, crossing the room, took a seat by her side.

"What do I think of you?" he reiterated. "What do you suppose I think of you? Have I been so stupidly dense during six weeks of daily intercourse, that I have not even made you understand that?"

"But to interfere in your private affairs, to seem to be prying at your actions, to accuse you of what you could not avoid, you must think me mean, hateful, detestable. It is all so unlike yourself."

"And so unlike you that I do not believe it, even when you say so. You see it is all the fault of our mutual friend. First, she misled me, and then she misled you, and so we have misled each other. The most remarkable part of it to me is, that she should have told you of it, for, honestly, it does not redound to her credit."

"I saw it, I tell you. I accused her of it, and to excuse herself (I suppose) she said she had not made up her mind yet if she would marry you."

"That was true, at all events," laughed Geoffrey; "she has not made up her mind yet, and I expect it will be a long time before she does. But supposing I were to give her the opportunity. Wouldn't you cry 'Amen' to the banns?"

"Oh, no. She is not the woman for you. She—she is not good enough!" said Rachel.

"Is that so? I am quite surprised. But you know, Miss Saltoun, I must not look too high. That is my misfortune. My art lifts me into the seventh heaven, where I dare not follow it. My soul's conceptions are of the fairest and most refined of women, but when she returns to earth she knows they are not for her, except in dreamland."

"But have you not met the realization of your ideal?"

"Yes! and I think she knows that I have met her. Do not call me presumptuous. She is as sacred to me as the silver-enshrined idol to the Buddhist worshipper—as far removed from me as the stars I look up to on a

summer's night. But I shall always—to my life's end—hold her as my inspiration and my ideal. She will come back to me upon my canvas to embody my highest thoughts of womanhood. She will be with me, though far apart, by night and day, for I have placed her in my soul, and my soul and I cannot be separated."

"Geoffrey!" exclaimed the girl, with parted lips, as she raised herself and looked at him, *is it I?*"

There was a sound of fear in her voice, just as there might have been in those of the chosen twelve, as they put the same question to their Master—as if a great revelation had suddenly fallen on her, and she was asking her soul if she could dare to follow it.

"Is it you?" he answered tenderly; "is it you who have given me the happiest thoughts, the brightest dreams, the purest revelation of womanhood that I have ever known?"

His hand stole round her waist as he spoke, and drew her closer to him.

"Yes, Rachel! it is you, and you only. You have marred my life, or made it. The world holds but one woman for me—only one, and that is you."

"Oh, Geoffrey!" she cried, suddenly, as she melted into his arms, "I love you!"

They forgot everything then but that they were man and woman—free, young, and beloved.

Their faces came together before they knew that they were coming, and his lips pressed hers with a soft, lingering kiss. For a moment they were in Heaven. It had been better if they had been there in reality. For remembrance poured back again upon them only too soon, and with remembrance came hell. Rachel was the first to recover her senses. Geoffrey was gazing downward at her face, and saw the warm flush his kiss had called forth succeeded by a pallor that wrinkled her white brows with pain, and compressed her lips tightly together. She raised herself quickly into a sitting position, and then, finding her lover too near, she darted from him to the other end of the room.

"What have I done?" she cried. "Oh, what have I done?"

"You have made me inexpressibly happy," replied Geoffrey, with a glowing face.

"No—no! don't say so! It was all a mistake. I did not think what I was doing. Oh, I am so ashamed of myself! so bitterly ashamed!" said Rachel, as she covered her face with her hands.

Geoffrey Salter left his seat and followed her.

"What are you ashamed of, Rachel? We have done nothing wrong."

"Oh, yes, we have. I am as bad as Mrs. Cranley."

"Don't mention your name in the same breath as hers. You pain me. She meant nothing by her folly."

"No more did I. Oh, do forget it, Mr. Salter. It is impossible. Quite impossible."

"What is impossible?"

"That—that—oh! you know what I mean. I have told you so often. I never intend to marry."

Geoffrey Salter drooped his head. The riddle was plain enough to him. She loved him—she would never have said so if she had not loved him. But the hosier's shop stood between her pride and him. The blood was mantling in his cheeks, but he raised his head proudly, and looked her in the face.

"Yes! I think I have heard you say so, long ago. And I believe I said the same."

"Let us keep to it then. It was a good resolution. It will bring us more peace than—than anything else. And we can still be friends, cannot we—the best and truest of friends?"

The girl looked almost defiant, as she questioned him thus, in an eager, impulsive way. She had thrown herself against the wall and was drawn up to her full height, as though preparing to battle with the fate which might overwhelm her.

Geoffrey Salter shook his head.

"I am afraid not," he said. "I am afraid we have never been friends, except for a very little while. We have been sleeping, Miss Saltoun, and whilst we slept, our dreams were very pleasant. But now we are awake it will be difficult to lull ourselves to sleep again. How-

ever, it little matters. To day is Thursday, and on Saturday I shall be gone. You have only to say the word, and we need never meet again."

He returned to his former occupation of remedying the damage she had done to her painting, whilst Rachel stood still, trembling with the sick fear that had dashed her brief-lived pleasure to the ground—the remembrance of the awful barrier that arose between this man and her, and the awful pain she saw in prospect, if she permitted it to spoil her life.

She had not failed to observe that he had returned to his former style of addressing her, and she had not the courage to do otherwise.

"Mr. Salter," she commenced, in a shaking voice.

"I am listening," he answered.

"Don't blame me. Don't think me bold, or forward. I *do* like you—very, very much, and—I was taken by surprise. But we have been such good friends, from the beginning, and it would be a pity to spoil it all, wouldn't it?"

"Ten thousand pities," replied Geoffrey.

"I think you are unkind to say we cannot be friends, because—because we have been so foolish. I forgot—you must have forgotten also—how often we have discussed the folly of marriage, and said how superior friendship was to love."

"I had quite forgotten!"

"You are sure you are not angry, then?"

"Why should I be angry? Because, for a moment, you permitted me to taste Heaven! It is rather I, Miss Saltoun, who should ask your forgiveness for having taken advantage of the situation. It was very wrong of me, it was presumptuous, unpardonable! I, an 'artist fellow' (as your noble grandfather calls me), to dare to have any of the feelings of a man, in the presence of the Honorable Miss Saltoun! I wonder you didn't call your flunkies to turn me out of doors."

"Oh, don't, *don't*!" she cried. "You are giving me such inexpressible pain."

"I suppose I am. I suppose we shall both have to feel

inexpressible pain for some time to come, and for no fault of our own. For you love me, Miss Saltoun. Your lips did not belie you ; neither have your eyes, for some time past. And I love you—like my own life. Don't let us deceive each other, or ourselves. But there, the barrier rises between us. I understand your hesitation, your remorse. No need to put it into words. We love each other ; but we cannot marry. We may suffer all our lives long, still we cannot marry. We may deceive another man and another woman into mating with us, under the pretence that our hearts are free. We may live lives of deceit and lovelessness. We may pine for each other, suffer for each other, even sin to get at one another. Still, the barrier is there, and we cannot marry—”

“ Oh, stop, stop, Mr. Salter, for mercy's sake ! ” cried Rachel, “ for I cannot bear any more to-day.”

And with that, she rushed from the room like a whirlwind, and left the artist to himself.

CHAPTER XX.

THE HOSIER'S SHOP.

FOR some moments after she had gained the shelter of her own apartments, she could not think. She locked the door behind her, and stood against it, with both her hands pressed to her forehead, and her brain in a confusing whirl. What had she done? What had happened to her? What awful calamity was this which threatened to overwhelm her?

She loved him—him—this man of genius, whom she adored—this man of low birth, whom she could never marry. Oh, it was cruel—bitterly hard and cruel. Her soul warred against the social barrier which rose up between them. Her true nature, which was noble and courageous enough to overlook all such paltry considerations in its aspirations after truth, and honesty, and virtue, cried out to her to be herself, and own the love which possessed her, without a blush. But Rachel had been reared in a school of conventionality, and custom and habit are strong with us all. She looked at the question from the other point of view, and said to herself, "I am strong, and I am courageous, and therefore I will fight with this terrible temptation till I have conquered it. How can I take my noble birth and name—my high social position and surroundings, and trample them under foot? What should I look like—what could I say—when Society heard that the man I had selected from all the world to be my life-long companion and my friend, was a hosier's son?

"I could not bear it. It would hurt my pride too much. It would kill me. No, it is impossible. At all costs—whatever I may feel, I must stamp this weakness out before it becomes too strong for me."

But here the remembrance of Geoffrey Salter's face—the look of supreme happiness she had evoked in his dark

blue eyes—the warm trembling kiss he had pressed upon her lips, and at which their spirits had seemed to rush together—above all, the genius which irradiated his soul, and the goodness which possessed his heart—poured back upon her mind, and made proud Rachel Saltoun fling herself upon the bed and sob unresistingly.

“Oh ! I cannot give him up,” she moaned ; “I love him. He is the only man (almost the only creature) who has ever touched my better nature, and made me long to become more like himself. I shall lose it all without him. I shall go back to be the hopeless, muddled thing I was when he took me in hand. And, after all, why should I care what other people say about it ? It is *my* soul only that is crying out for his. I am free, and rich and independent. What is the use of all these things if I may not exercise my own judgment in the most important event of my life ? Geoffrey Salter means for me salvation. I will not be a coward. I will do what I think right, never mind what the world may say.”

As this determination flashed through her mind, Rachel raised herself to a sitting position, and drew her handkerchief across her eyes.

“I will brave this out,” she thought ; “I will see the very worst for myself. I will go and visit Mr. Salter’s shop. I will stand up manfully against this giant of my imagination, and perhaps I shall find it is only a shadow after all.”

She washed the traces of tears from her face as she spoke, and re-arranged her abundant hair, and then she attired herself in a dark walking costume, and tied a thick veil over her features.

“I will consult no one, and I will take no one with me,” she said to herself, as she went downstairs ; “I am my own mistress, and responsible to no living creature. For this day, at least, I will exercise my legal rights, and keep my secret.”

She had half a mile to walk to the station, but it was still early in the morning, and she reached it without meeting any one she knew.

“Let me think,” she said, with a heavy sigh, as she lay

back upon the cushions of the railway carriage ; "all he told me was that his father kept a hosier's shop in the City. That sounds very vague, for I have never been in the City in my life. Still, there cannot be so many hosiers there of the name of Salter, and his father's Christian name must be William, for he told me once that his eldest brother was called after him. 'William Salter, hosier ;' oh, Heavens ! how awful it does sound."

When she arrived at Waterloo, Rachel hailed a cab and told the driver to take her to the nearest post-office.

She was so unused to go anywhere by herself, or unattended by a retinue of servants, that she felt as if she were moving in some feverish dream. But her nerves were strung up to their highest tension. She experienced the same sort of desperate courage that makes a condemned criminal walk steadily to the scaffold. She felt she was going to see what might prove the death-blow to all her hopes. Still, she must see it, if it killed her.

Arrived at the post-office, she asked to look at the directory, and soon found the name she wanted under the heading of "Trade." But such a number of Salters ! It dazzled her eyes to read the list. Only three Williams, though, and two of those were poulterers.

Just under them, "Salter, William, hosier, 33 Broadgate Street," stood out in letters of red and blue, and green fire before her aching vision.

She had gained her wish, however, and she returned to her cab and gave the driver the address.

How her head whirled as she rattled through the busy, crowded streets, with her eyes closed, and her spirit inwardly praying for courage to go through what lay before her.

"Thirty-three Broadgate Street, miss," said the cabman presently, bawling to her through the trap, and Rachel leapt from the vehicle and tendered him double his fare.

"Not going back, miss ?" he demanded, with a touch of his hat.

Ladies do not bear a good name with cab-drivers for liberality, and this one thought he should not mind waiting about a little to carry his fare back to the West End.

But Rachel shook her head. She wanted time and leisure for her inspection. She wanted to look the hosier's shop, as it were, full in the face, and argue and reason with herself whilst she did so.

So the cabman drove off, and left her standing on the pavement alone.

At first she felt so nervous that she walked rapidly on for a few paces.

Suppose anyone who knew her had seen her descend before that particular spot. Suppose any of Geoffrey's people should recognize her from his description, or from the photograph she had given him of herself.

But that fear was soon laid to rest by reason. Geoffrey was not the sort of man to talk of her at all (especially under the circumstances), and far less to show her photograph. Rachel felt that, without knowing it. Every line of the character she had been studying so carefully for the last six weeks was against it. Geoffrey was too reserved, too modest, too self-contained. His family circle had heard nothing of his thoughts, his hopes, or feelings concerning her.

On that conviction, she took heart of grace to walk back again till she reached thirty-three. It was a large, handsome shop, with plate-glass windows, filled with hosiery and fleecy goods of all sorts, combined with buttons, and braids, and trimmings.

Rachel crossed Broadgate Street, and looked at it from the other side. It had a private door, and, apparently, a fine set of rooms above; but it was, undeniably, a shop *pur et simple*, and without any pretensions to be anything else. There were the great brass plates, with "Salter, Hosier," engraved on them on either side the doorway; and the same horrible legend ran above it.

Rachel pictured to herself Geoffrey's brothers and sisters, smirking and bowing behind the counter for every shilling handed over it, till she grew sick and faint with the idea.

Why was he so different from all this? Why did he look so refined? and why was he so fastidious in all his tastes, if he were only a hosier's son? Oh, there must be

some mistake about it? Geoffrey must have been jesting with her, trying how far he could go. It was *impossible* he had been born and brought up in the shop she was gazing on.

By and by Rachel crossed the street again, and walked deliberately into No. 33. She had almost persuaded herself that it was a delusion by this time, and that she had been frightened by a bugbear.

As the heavy glass door swung behind her, a young man advanced and asked her pleasure.

Rachel glanced up at him. He was tall and fair. Not a bit like Geoffrey in any respect, and yet he seemed in authority there.

She plucked up her courage, and asked to see some silk stockings.

The young man placed a chair for her at the counter, called out, "Harvey, are you serving? Silk stockings here;" and then Rachel found herself *vis-à-vis* with an ordinary shop server, who was grimacing at her over several parcels of silk hosiery.

He found his customer very hard to please. Rachel's thoughts were far away from the goods before her, for she was wondering how she could contrive to gain speech of the master of the establishment. So, as she held a pair of black silk stockings in one hand, and a pair of dark blue in the other, she half whispered to the assistant who was trying to persuade her to purchase each shade in turn:

"Is Mr. William Salter in the shop? I mean the head of the firm."

He looked surprised, but answered:

"I'll ask, miss."

And then, calling to the young man who had received Rachel, and was still walking up and down the centre of the shop, and overlooking all that was going on, he said,—

"Mr. John, sir. This lady wants Mr. Salter. Is he in the 'ouse?"

Rachel shivered as she heard the words, "*Mr. John, sir.*" That was Jack, of course, the youngest brother, who didn't like to stay at home and help his father. And, naturally enough, as Geoffrey had said. What a position!

What an outlook for any youth of spirit or ambition ! She glanced again at "Mr. John, sir," this time timidly. He was decidedly good-looking, but very unlike his brother, both in manners and appearance. She wondered how Geoffrey could ever make up his mind to visit such a home.

"Do you wish to see my father, madam ?" he asked, as he came forward and stood beside her.

"Yes," stammered Rachel, pulling her hat well over her eyes ; "if it is convenient, I should like to ask him a question, but it is of no great consequence—I can come another day," she continued, afraid of her audacity when it seemed to be gratified.

"I believe my father is in the counting-house ; I am sure he will see you if you desire it," replied the young man, as he walked away.

Rachel had been concocting a fable in order to reach Mr. Salter's presence, all the time she had been professing to examine the hosiery, but now that she had to try if it would hold water, she felt rather nervous about her success.

"And which pair have you chosen, miss ?" demanded the assistant, who feared he was about to lose his sale.

"Oh ! any one," replied Rachel, hurriedly. "I really don't care. Put me up half a dozen pairs of the black. How much will they be ?"

The young man had begun to select the hose, and make out the bill, when John Salter returned, and asked Rachel to accompany him to the counting-house.

She jumped up with a rapidly beating heart, scattering the contents of her purse on the floor. John Salter went down on his knees in a moment, and picked up the gold and silver as it was rolling along the ground, and restored it to its owner, who, with blushing cheeks and shaking knees, followed him into Mr. Salter's presence. The old man rose to receive her, and asked what he might have the pleasure to do for her.

"I hope," began Rachel, "you will not think I am intruding on your privacy, Mr. Salter, but I have a young friend in whom I am deeply interested, and whom I am anxious to place as a shop-assistant with some well-known firm."

This was, of course, only a *ruse* on Miss Saltoun's part. It was the fable she had been concocting while she turned over the stockings—the only pretext she could think of to gain access to Geoffrey's father.

"Your name, madam?" he replied.

Rachel started. She had never thought of the necessity of giving a name, and had to invent one on the spur of the moment.

"Mrs. Woods," she replied.

"And you wish to place your friend behind the counter? Has she had any experience?"

"No, not yet."

"That makes the matter rather a difficult one. Had it been otherwise, I might, with suitable references, have placed the young woman with some of my friends."

"You have no vacancy yourself?" murmured Rachel.

"No, madam. I employ no women here."

"I thought I saw a young woman at the cashier's desk."

"Ah! that was my daughter. She takes that part of the business off my hands. Otherwise, our assistants are all male."

"I am sorry I troubled you," said Rachel, rising, and looking for the first time at her companion. The expression of his face, as he regarded her, struck her like a sudden blow; it was so like—so *very* like another look which haunted and distressed her.

"But if you will leave me your address," he suggested, regarding her with those kind brown eyes of his, the while; so keen and yet so mild, beneath their bushy brow.

"Oh, no!" stammered Rachel. "It is of no consequence. I had heard of you, and I thought perhaps there might be a vacancy here. But now! Pray, don't mention it again. I will look elsewhere."

But, before she crossed the threshold, an idea, a distant hope perhaps, that she had been altogether mistaken, made her halt and say, in an uncertain manner,—

"I know a gentleman bearing your name—a relation perhaps—Mr. Geoffrey Salter, the artist."

A proud look beamed over the father's face. One might easily read how the fame and the name of Geoffrey were considered in the hosier's shop.

"Indeed, madam! You know him? He is my son—the pride of our family, as you may well believe. I am not quite sure how some of us would bear our lives were it not for the thought of Geoffrey."

"He is very clever, certainly."

"He is a heaven-born genius, madam. It is not only a father's natural pride in him that makes me say so. The world confirms the verdict. My son is very fortunate, and all his family rejoice in his good fortune, for his own sake. Have you seen him lately, madam?"

"Oh, no! not lately; not for a long time. We have not met during the season, but I have quite lost sight of him," stammered the girl.

"He is not a man to be easily lost sight of," rejoined Mr. Salter, still boiling over with pride; "the world values him too much. He is staying at Roehampton now, doing some decorative work for the Honorable Miss Saltoun, the grand-daughter of the Duke of Craig-Morris. It seems strange, does it not," he continued, smiling, "to hear a man in my position speak of his son mixing in such high society? But it is his talent, madam, that has raised him there, but never had the power to make him ashamed of his own family. God bless him!"

"You must be very proud of him," said Rachel, softly.

"I *am* proud of him, madam, but less for his talent than for his goodness. Geoffrey is the best son that ever lived, both to his mother and myself. But all my children are good. I have reason to be proud of all of them, and thankful for them. And I am. Had I known you knew my dear boy, I would have been more anxious to serve you. Will you leave your young friend's name and address, madam, and let me see what I can do for her?"

"Not to-day, Mr. Salter," replied Rachel, confusedly. "I will consult her first, and then—perhaps I may return. I will wish you good-morning now, with many thanks for your courtesy."

"And should you see my son Geoffrey," said Mr. Salter, as he opened the door for her, "and want to ask him a favor, tell him you know his old father in the City, madam, and he will not refuse it you. John," he continued to his son, "call a cab for this lady, and see her safely into it. She knows our Geoffrey."

Upon which Rachel found herself so much an object of attention, both to "Mr John, sir," and all the assistants, that she was thankful to jump into a hansom and drive away as fast as possible. At first she had given Waterloo Station as her destination, but as soon as she had left Broadgate Street behind her, she told the cabman to drive all the way to Roehampton. For she did not feel capable of moving. All her excitement and heart-burning was past. She was transfixed with pain—paralyzed—turned to stone. She saw that the moment had come when she must prove her strength of mind and courage to battle with the foe. She knew all now, and all was worse than she had anticipated. On the way home, she leant far back in the cab, with her teeth fixed, and her hands pressed tightly over her eyes. She must trample on this temptation as best as she could. For, if it killed her, she must trample on it. For her name's sake—for the sake of her dead father and mother, and all her family, she must not marry a hosier's son.

CHAPTER XXI.

EXIT MRS. CRANLEY.

HAVING once made up her mind, Rachel Saltoun was not the woman to falter in her purpose. She dismissed her cab at Roehampton, having paid the driver exactly what he demanded, and walked the rest of the way to Catherstone.

It was now the afternoon; the luncheon hour had passed some time before, and the autumn shadows had commenced to gather. The old place looked lovely, adorned with its varied foliage of red and orange, and brown and green, but Rachel did not notice it, except to think how sad it all appeared, and what an emblem of decay. Even at that early period of the renunciation of her secret hopes, she could reason with herself. Even then she knew it was the prospect of losing Geoffrey Salter's society, that made her turn with a sickly loathing from her own beloved home, and that the void he left there would never be filled by anybody else. Still, if it must be, it must be. There was no help for it, no way out of the horrible pitfall she had so foolishly prepared for herself. She had been rash, and she must suffer for her rashness; it was the usual penalty. She could not alleviate her sufferings by disgracing her family. It should never be written on future pedigrees that a Saltoun had lowered herself to marry a tradesman's son.

Rachel took a painful pleasure in dubbing poor Geoffrey simply as the "hosier's son," at this period. She seemed to have forgotten, or she refused to remember, that he was a genius, and a gentleman; that she had never had occasion to find fault with, or to blush for his manners or his appearance. No. Whatever he might be in the present, he had been born in a hosier's shop, and he was not

ashamed of it. Those were the only crimes of which she had to accuse him, and which she kept on repeating to herself, lest any soft, ridiculous self-pity should rise in her heart, and plead for Geoffrey's happiness and her own.

She crept up to her bedroom more like a housemaid returning home after her time, than the proud heiress of Catherstone; and when she had reached it, she sat down to consider what she should do next, before she summoned her maid to attend her.

First of all, she was determined not to see Mr. Salter again. He was leaving on Saturday, and his check would of course be sent after him. And the next thing to do, would be to leave Catherstone herself. She could not stay there, Rachel said, with a shiver, whilst remembrance was so vivid. She hated the thought of the panellied drawing-room, and all it had done for her. She would join her aunt and uncle at Scarborough, and leave Mrs. Cranley to look after the house.

Rachel had not yet decided what to do with regard to Kate Cranley. The condemnation of her conduct tripped so closely on the heels of her own. Perhaps it would be wiser to leave it for future consideration; the present was all she need think of until after Saturday. The question of how best to avoid an awkward *contretemps* by meeting Mr. Salter again, threw her back upon the woman's great resource—illness. She rung her bell and told Mears she had such a dreadful headache, that she would have her dinner sent up to her own room. The maid respectfully begged to be allowed to remove her young mistress's costume, and substitute a tea-gown, to which Rachel consented.

"Perhaps you have over-walked yourself, madam," she suggested.

"Perhaps I have, Mears. I have been sitting too much over my painting lately. The smell of oil-paint always did affect my head; and then I tried to walk it off. However, least said, soonest mended. I will lie down on the sofa with a book, and tell Mrs. Cranley I do not wish to be disturbed."

The next morning, Miss Saltoun declared herself too ill

to leave her bed, and Kate Cranley came up to inquire the reason.

"Let me send for Dr. Osborne, dear Miss Saltoun," she pleaded; "it is so unlike you to give in."

"I have not 'given in,' as you call it, Mrs. Cranley, and I don't want Dr. Osborne. I have simply a detestable fit of neuralgia, and rest is the only thing to cure it."

"You were away such a time yesterday," said the companion, reproachfully.

"Yes; I had business to transact," replied Rachel.

"But you'll be well by to-morrow, surely?"

"I really cannot tell. Why should I be?"

"Oh, Mr. Salter will be so dreadfully disappointed if he has to leave without saying good-bye to you. He starts for Italy on Sunday, you know; and that last panel is simply perfect. It exceeds all the others."

"I have seen the last panel. It was nearly finished yesterday. You can easily say good-bye to Mr. Salter for me, and give him his check. But I want you to write a letter for me, Mrs. Cranley. You will find all the materials at hand. Write to Sir Henry Mordaunt, and tell him I am not feeling quite the thing, and shall join them at Scarborough on Monday."

"Oh, dear! Isn't that rather a sudden determination?"

"Not at all. I always leave Catherstone in the autumn."

"Well, it will be very pleasant. We shall find Scarborough very gay just now."

"I do not intend to take you with me. I am going as a guest to my uncle's house. You will stay behind, and look after Catherstone for me, as Miss Montrie used to do. I do not like to leave it entirely to servants."

Kate Cranley was greatly discomfited by this piece of intelligence. She ruffled under it, like a hen with upstanding feathers. She had quite expected that she would be Miss Saltoun's companion under all circumstances, and felt intuitively that her conduct with Geoffrey Salter had been the means of this rebuff. She grew very white (for

she was an ill-tempered woman, though she dared not show it), and nibbled her pen, before she replied.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Saltoun. Am I to understand I do not accompany you to Scarborough?"

"Did I not say so plainly enough? I have no right to invite you to Sir Henry Mordaunt's house."

"It seems very much like putting me in the position of housekeeper."

"Does it? Your predecessor, Miss Montrie, considered it part of her duty to take my place whilst I was absent."

"But I am *not* Miss Montrie, Miss Saltoun. You told me, on engaging me, that you required some one vastly superior to her."

"I may have required it, Mrs. Cranley. I don't think I got it."

"Do you mean to insult me, Miss Saltoun?"

"On the contrary, I do not consider, after the disgusting scene that took place in my drawing-room the other night, that you are capable of being insulted."

Mrs. Cranley curled her lip.

"The 'disgusting scene,' as you term it, Miss Saltoun, seems to have made a marvellous impression upon you. Some people might attribute the strength of your feelings to jealousy.

Rachel grew livid with rage.

"Do you know who you are speaking to?" she cried. Are you too ignorant to recognize the difference between your station and mine? I should disgrace my name if I kept you about my person any longer. You will leave me to-morrow, Mrs. Cranley——"

"Oh, dear!" was the tittering reply; "poor Mr. Salter and I dismissed at the same moment! How very singular. One might imagine we were guilty of the same offence. Well, Miss Saltoun, all I can say is that I trust you will never disgrace the name you profess to think so much of by any worse act than having me for your companion."

"Leave the room! I will not endure your presence another moment!" exclaimed Rachel, hotly; and as Mrs. Cranley obeyed her order she buried her burning face in

her pillows. But the insulting insinuations which had been made determined her, at all hazards, to go downstairs and see the house cleared for herself. All sorts of surmises—surmises too fatally near the truth, might be provoked, if she declined on so frivolous a pretence to see Geoffrey Salter again.

Kate Cranley was a dangerous woman. Rachel recognized the fact, now that, perhaps, it was too late, and capable of saying or doing something to bring her employer's name into disrepute, out of revenge for her summary dismissal. So, having written to Sir Henry Mordaunt to say she should join his party on the Monday, and a note to Mrs. Cranley, enclosing her quarter's check, in lieu of notice, with a request that she would leave Catherstone as soon as possible, Miss Saltoun rung for Mears, and having made her toilette, descended in state to the library. She was not looking handsome on that occasion. Hers was a face, the charm of which depended entirely on its expression, and anxiety or trouble made it almost plain. She was very pale, and pride had compressed her lips and knit her brows. Her eyes lacked lustre, and her gaze was stern. She looked very dignified and very aristocratic, as she moved about her library, and tried to fix her attention on the daily papers and monthly magazines, but she also looked very unhappy.

"Well, good-bye, Mr. Salter, and good luck to you!" she heard Kate Cranley exclaim, in an unnecessarily loud voice, raised on purpose that she might hear it. "I've got the sack, as perhaps you've heard, and am off at once. I have plenty of friends to go to, thank God!—powerful and aristocratic friends into the bargain, who will be more than surprised to hear of the reason I'm leaving Catherstone. And I shouldn't wonder if my going were the cause of a little trouble. However, that's not *my* fault. Well, you'll be the next! Hope we shall meet again soon. Good-bye!"

And off went Mrs. Cranley, laughing, to the cab, which, crowned with her luggage, waited her at the hall door.

Rachel was thankful that she had not considered it necessary to bid her a formal adieu. She dreaded scenes

of all sorts, and beyond everything her proud soul writhed under an insult, either from equal or inferior. It is so impossible for a gentlewoman to meet open abuse without lowering herself to the standard of her abuser. She must either suffer contumely in silence, or return blow for blow. And either alternative is beneath her dignity.

Rachel breathed freer when she heard the vehicle which contained Mrs. Cranley rattle down the drive. One great dread drove away with her. She had no longer the opportunity to hint at the horrible suspicions that evidently lurked in her own mind before Mr. Salter. Rachel knew that if she were obliged to see this gentleman again, she had a task before her, which would be rendered doubly hard by the knowledge that he had gained any idea of the struggles she had passed through.

She sat alone all that afternoon, with a book held religiously in her hand, whilst her thoughts went scurrying hither and thither, yet always came back to the point when Geoffrey Salter held her in his arms, and some invisible agency, against which she had no power to cope, drove those words bubbling to her lips—“*I love you.*” As Rachel remembered it, she sighed deeply. It was indeed true. She loved him. Yet she must cut him out of her heart forever!

As she was musing thus, the dusk fell, and a servant entered the room with lights.

“No, no, James,” said Miss Saltoun, almost fretfully; “I don’t wish for the lights! My head aches!”

“Mr. Salter desires me to say, madam, as he have finished, and would you be good enough to step to the drawing-room and see the panel?”

Rachel’s heart began to beat rapidly.

“Ask Mr. Salter to come here instead,” she said.

“Without the lights, madam?”

“Yes; I only want to speak to him for a minute.”

And she left her seat, and stood by the mantel-shelf, as though she would give the artist no encouragement to stay. Her face was deadly pale, and she pushed her hair off her forehead with an impatient gesture, making it look higher than usual. The dusky light just caught her figure here

and there, but concentrated itself upon her white, stern features.

So Geoffrey thought, as he entered the library, and advanced towards her. He, too, was shaking in every limb. He did not quite know what this summons meant, but his pride was in arms as well as her own, and there would be no truce unless she made the first advances.

"I beg your pardon," he commenced; "I was told you wished to speak to me."

"Yes—only about the panel," replied Rachel, without offering him her hand. "James said the work is finished, and you wished me to inspect it. I suppose that means that you are about to leave Roehampton?"

"It means just what I said, Miss Saltoun. I consider the panels completed, but should like to hear you second my opinion before I go. I have still time to put in a few extra touches if you think them necessary. If not I shall return to town to-night, as I have a good deal to do before I start for Italy."

"There is no need for me to inspect them, Mr. Salter. How could I presume to criticise your work? I am only very grateful to you for having undertaken it. But I should like to settle up every thing before we part. Please take a seat whilst I write a check for the amount we agreed upon."

She turned from him as she spoke, and, drawing a chair to her writing-table, lighted a taper, preparatory to unlocking the drawer where she kept her bank-book.

"Miss Saltoun," said Geoffrey's rich, soft voice behind her.

"Yes, Mr. Salter," she answered, in a low tone.

"I wish you would not draw that check. I wish you would let me leave those panels behind me, just as a token that I have been here."

"I cannot, Mr. Salter."

"You mean that you will not lay yourself under an obligation to me?"

"No, not exactly that. I have no pride of that sort. Only—well, you came here on a certain understanding, and I must keep my part of the engagement."

"I know I came here on a certain understanding—as the artist who was to paint the panels. It is a pity I did not keep to it, isn't it?"

"You *have* kept to it. The panels are painted, and I am infinitely obliged to you. There is the check, and many thanks with it."

He took it from her hand, and, tearing it in a dozen pieces, trampled them passionately under his foot.

"That is childish!" exclaimed Rachel. "You will only give me the trouble of drawing the check over again, and paying it into your bank."

There is hardly any accusation a man resents more from a woman's lips than that of being "childish." It nearly drove Geoffrey Salter wild.

"*Childish!*" he reiterated. "Yes, indeed, I have been childish. I was a child ever to come down here. A child to accept your offer of friendship. A child to imagine you ever regarded me with a higher degree of favor than you would bestow on a serviceable ostler or a groom."

Rachel was terrified by this sudden outburst. She was not prepared for it. She had not supposed that Geoffrey would open the subject again without encouragement to do so.

"Oh, pray hush, Mr. Salter!" she exclaimed. "You know that you are talking nonsense, that no one ever appreciated your talent more than I do, or your friendship," she added, in a lower tone. "How can you think me so ungrateful? Do you suppose I do not appreciate all the kindness you have shown in directing my studies—all the patience you have had with my ignorance and incapability—all the——"

But here Rachel found her voice breaking, and thought it more prudent to stop.

"I do not know, and I do not care," he replied, recklessly; "all *that* was the outcome of our friendship and sympathy. It came as naturally to me to teach you as to talk to you. Would it had been the only outcome! But I think you asked me not to speak of that. But tell me one thing. It is the last I shall ever ask you. Has the—

the difference in your behavior to me anything to do with Mrs. Cranley?"

"None at all, Mr. Salter."

"You do not think that I encouraged her—that her behavior was pleasing to me—that it met with my approval?"

"I do not."

"It is entirely of your own accord, then? It is a decision you have worked out for yourself—that is founded upon what you believe to be best for your future happiness?"

Rachel bowed her head in silence. She was firm in her resolve, but she felt that to put it into words would have choked her.

"I understand you, Miss Saltoun," said Geoffrey, sorrowfully, "and I will worry you no longer. Only let us forget this miserable little episode for one moment, and say good-bye as friends."

"Oh, Geoffrey—Mr. Salter," she cried, "cannot we be friends still?"

"Yes; when you can persuade the river that has overleapt its boundaries and mingled with the illimitable ocean to return to its mountain bed, not before. No, Miss Saltoun, life is hard enough as it is. Don't let us attempt impossibilities. I thank you for all the happiness you have afforded me, and I would not have missed even this bitter disappointment. It was the most awful presumption for me even to think of it," he said, with affected lightness of tone, "and it will be a lesson to me. I shall be all the better for it by-and-by. And now, may God bless you," he added, as he wrung her hand violently and turned away.

But as he reached the library door, he came back again.

"Don't blame yourself, dear—not one little bit. It was all my fault," he whispered, sweetly, and walked rapidly away.

And Rachel Saltoun, standing there with her heart turned to stone, could not utter one word to him of farewell.

CHAPTER XXII.

DESPERATELY GAY.

SIR HENRY MORDAUNT was delighted by the receipt of his niece's letter. He had always been anxious that she should associate more closely with her aunt and cousins, and her voluntary offer to join them at Scarborough pleased him immensely. He had secured a pretty little house, overlooking the Spa, for the season, and came beaming into his wife's drawing-room with Miss Saltoun's letter in his hand.

"My dear! I have such good news from Ray. She is coming to Scarborough on Monday, and she has dismissed that horrid Mrs. Cranley. I am so pleased. I was sure Ray would never endure that woman's morals or manners for long. And the dear child seems in such good spirits, too. She says, 'I hope Aunt Mary and the girls are having a good time of it, for I am in the humor to be desperately gay.'"

"Is Ray coming to stay with us?" cried Lena Mordaunt. "Oh! that will be lovely. She is such a capital companion and can be so entertaining when she chooses."

Her sister Rose looked as pleased as she did. Both the girls had experienced the generosity of Rachel's disposition, and knew that they would lack for nothing as soon as she was amongst them.

"Well, this is quite a new trait in Rachel's character," said Lady Mordaunt. "Fancy her wanting to be 'desperately gay!' She who has set her face so deliberately against all sorts of frivolity and amusement. She has lectured our girls again and again for wasting their time, as she called it, at afternoon teas and dances."

"Oh, never mind, my dear! Forget all about that. Ray has seen the folly of living the life of an old woman at her age, and I'm very glad of it. How is she ever to get a suit-

able husband, cooped up with a companion at Catherstone? Here, on the Spa, she'll be seen as she ought to be. By the way, Mary, just come here."

He drew his wife into a bay window, and whispered,—

"What do you think about my giving Vivian a hint of this? He asked me, before we left town, where Rachel was going this year, and I couldn't tell him. He'll be after her like a shot if he knows she is here, and then there's no saying what may happen."

"It's an excellent idea, Harry, if you and Lord Vivian will keep your own counsel. But should Rachel get a hint of it——"

"Oh, trust us for that, my dear. You are much more likely to let it out. He can meet us accidentally on the Spa, and you must be as much surprised as myself at the *rencontre*. Not a word to the girls, mind!"

"You may trust me. And I really think Ray will enjoy herself. What with the esplanade and the boating, and the Spa, and the theatres, it is very charming here."

"By Jove! that reminds me. Vivian has a yacht. I wonder if he could bring her round. It would be such a splendid excuse for throwing her in his company. And he really is a first-rate young fellow, Mary. It is ten thousand pities Rachel cannot take a fancy to him."

"It is, indeed. I only wish he'd propose to one of our girls. I should consider it a most excellent match."

"So should I, but one cannot direct these things. Rachel is a strange girl. I often wonder if she is sincere in her abuse of matrimony, or whether there is someone in the background. It is so unnatural for a young woman not to wish to be married."

"Not in a girl like Rachel, who is her own mistress, and has everything she can desire. She is under no control to make her long for independence. She can do what she likes, and go where she likes. She has no necessity for a husband."

"That's complimentary to our sex, my dear," said Sir Henry, laughing,

"It's true, Hal, nevertheless. The women are getting more independent and self-supporting every day, and the

further they advance in that direction, the less they will desire to marry. What has marriage represented to the majority, hitherto. *A home of their own.* Freedom from the control of parents, and an independent income. Rachel has all that without hampering herself with a husband. She will not marry till she feels the want of love."

"Ah, my dear! you have touched the very point on which my greatest fear for Ray is grounded. She has (as you say) everything except companionship. And being so independent in mind, as well as body, I am always afraid lest she should consider nothing in choosing a husband, except her own inclinations."

"My goodness, Hal! You don't imagine that she will marry her groom, or her footman, do you?"

"My dear! I wouldn't like to swear that Rachel wouldn't even go as far as that, if she considered the man was sympathetic with her."

"But she's so proud. She considers everybody her inferior."

"Yes, in one way she's proud, and in another she isn't. If she thought her honor was concerned, she would be too proud *not* to carry out her sense of right, too proud to defer to the world's opinion. But we are taking an extreme case. The worst I fear is, that she may marry some man without a farthing, or without a single merit in anybody's eyes, but her own."

"Well! well! she has enough for two," said Lady Mordaunt, soothingly.

"I know that," returned her husband; "but don't you see that the very fact of her money should secure Rachel a title, if not another fortune? Why, Vivian is not half good enough for her. I see that, myself. She should marry a duke, or an earl. But as he's desperately in love with her——"

"And the duke is not forthcoming," laughed his wife.

"Exactly so, my dear. We must make the best of the material at hand. Now, if you will arrange everything for Ray's reception, I will write to Lord Vivian, and perhaps her visit to Scarborough may seal her fate."

Lady Mordaunt doubted it, but she was very pleased at the prospect of her niece's advent, and welcomed her cordially when she arrived (with Mears in attendance) on the following Monday.

Rachel Saltoun had indeed journeyed to Scarborough with the idea of being "desperately gay." She believed that the only way to crush the pain out of her heart, and to stamp down remembrance, was to entirely change the life she had been leading. She had resolved not to see Catherstone again till she could look at it with perfect equanimity, nor to think of art or painting if she could avoid it. She had directed Mears to pack all her best and most extravagant dresses for her visit to Scarborough, and had even brought with her a selection of the jewellery which her uncle had reproached her for not wearing, for the benefit of the world.

She met her aunt and cousins, dressed in the latest fashion, wreathed in smiles, and full, apparently, of the gaieties in store for her.

"Oh, my dear girls," she cried, to her cousins, "what a delightful change this is from dull old Catherstone. There, autumn seems already to have set in, and here it is still summer. The smell of the sea, as I drove from the station, seemed to invigorate me at once. And how well you are all looking. I wish I had joined you a month ago."

"I wish you had, dear Ray," said Lady Mordaunt. "Rosie and Lena bathed every day when they first came here, but it's getting rather late for that now."

"Oh, it's not too late for me," exclaimed Rachel, gayly; "nothing is going to be too late for me. And I mean to have such lovely rambles with Rosie and Lena."

"Haven't you brought any dogs, Rachel?" asked Lena; "it seems strange to see you without Oscar and little Jenny."

Ray gave a sudden sigh.

"No, Lena. I felt so sick of Catherstone all of a sudden, that I thought I would leave everything behind me—everything—and strike out a new life for myself. I have been cooped up there too long; it has made me quite ill.

Why didn't you write and tell me what a lovely, fresh, breezy place this is?"

"Oh, Ray, we should have done so, but papa said you had some gentleman down there, decorating the house, a Mr.—what was his name?" said Rose, breaking off.

"Salter," replied Miss Saltoun, sharply. "But that wouldn't have signified. I could have come all the same. I could have left Mrs. Cranley to mind the house."

"That reminds me," said Sir Henry, "that you have dismissed that woman. I was glad to hear it, Ray; but what was the immediate cause?"

Rachel blushed scarlet.

"She offended my sense of propriety, uncle. No need to go into further details. And when I remonstrated with her on her conduct, she was impertinent. You were right, and I was wrong; do not let us say any more about it."

"And who is looking after Catherstone for you?" asked Lady Mordaunt.

"It is looking after itself, Aunt Mary; or, rather, I have placed all responsibility in the hands of my old butler and housekeeper. They are quite equal to it. How much longer do you intend to stay in Scarborough?"

"We meant to remain here another month, dear; but, I suppose, our movements will somewhat depend now upon your own. Shall you feel equal to visiting the theatre this evening?"

"Dear me, yes," cried Rachel; "a dozen theatres, if I had time. I don't feel a bit tired."

"Not after a nine hours' journey? My dear girl, you must be as strong as a pony. I was fit for nothing for two days after I arrived here. But I am glad you can accompany us."

"It is so lovely!" murmured Lena. "They have all the best London companies down here. And when the play is over, we have the most charming walks on the Spa; sometimes till twelve o'clock."

"You quite excite me with your descriptions, and I mean to enjoy myself thoroughly," said Rachel. "But now I must go and change my dress. Come, Lena, dear, and

tell me what I had better put on, for this wonderful combination of theatre and Spa. I mustn't appear for the first time before the natives of Scarborough, as if I had just emerged from the depths of the country."

Whatever she appeared like, Miss Saltoun attracted sufficient notice when she walked on the Spa that evening, with her aristocratic bearing, and a broad white hat, and plumes overshadowing her proud, cold face.

The rumor of her wealth, and who she was, soon permeated the town, and Sir Henry and Lady Mordaunt, who had already a large acquaintance, found it increased twofold. Invitations poured in upon them, party succeeded party, and the Honorable Miss Saltoun was quickly nominated the belle of Scarborough.

She kept the farce up wonderfully, even before her own family; and the Mordaunts, one and all, declared they had never known before that Rachel could indulge in such hilarious spirits, or derive so much amusement from theatres, balls, and garden-parties.

"Now that you have tasted of those girlish pleasures, my dear," remarked her uncle, kindly, "I hope you will continue to partake of them. They do you good, Rachel; prevent you from growing old before your time. I was getting quite alarmed at your sedentary habits. They are not natural at twenty-three. Young creatures want life and sunshine. Time enough to mope when you can do nothing better."

"I quite agree with you, Uncle Henry," replied Rachel; "and I never mean to give it up again, you may depend upon that. It has been the taste of blood to the tiger. Never, all my life, will I cease to go out now and enjoy myself. I feel as if going back to Catherstone would drive me mad!—*mad!*"

And off she rushed to join her cousins in an expedition round the bay. Only occasionally did her task of determined forgetfulness seem too hard to her. When her aunt would introduce an unwelcome topic, and press it home (as some people will) notwithstanding all Ray's endeavors to change the conversation.

"You have never told us anything about your drawing-

room panels, Ray," she commenced, one day; "were they quite finished before you left home?"

"Yes, Aunt Mary."

"They are very beautiful, I suppose. They *must* be from Mr. Salter's brush. What a lucky girl you are to possess them. They will be heirlooms. And that exquisite picture, too, 'The Awakening of the Soul.' Where have you hung it? I have not visited Catherstone since it came home."

"In the gallery, Aunt Mary. Lena, shall we have a turn on the cliff before luncheon?"

"But what part of the gallery, Ray?" continued Lady Mordaunt. "And did Mr. Salter superintend the hanging himself? And how did you like him? Is he a gentleman—presentable?"

"Yes! well enough."

"What does it signify if he's a gentleman or not?" interposed the Baronet. "His business is painting, and he paints beautifully. That is enough for us. But I think you are a little bit extravagant about such things, Ray. Engaging Royal Academy artists to decorate your panels, at a hundred pounds a piece, is rather a quick way of getting rid of your money—eh!"

"I shall not do it again, Uncle Henry. These will last me a lifetime."

"It is to be hoped so, my dear. Even your fortune will not afford many such drawing-rooms. Catherstone will be quite a show place soon."

"It shall never be that, whilst I reign over it," replied Rachel.

"But, Ray, tell me, is Mr. Salter as handsome as people say," recommenced Lady Mordaunt. "A lady I met at the Collards last Thursday was positively raving about him. She declared he is the handsomest man in London."

"He may be, Aunt Mary. I don't think that I'm a good judge of such things. Stop still, nunky! there's a wasp crawling over your collar. There he goes! buzzing through the window. Oh, let us go, too, girls. I am dying for the sunshine and the sea breeze," and she pulled her cousins playfully from the room as she spoke.

That evening, as they were all promenading on the Spa, they encountered Lord Vivian with a friend, arm-in-arm. Sir Henry felt very guilty as he saw them approaching, for he had his lordship's letter in his pocket, announcing his arrival in Scarborough, and he was very doubtful how his niece would receive her discarded suitor. But to his astonishment, as the young man unlinked his arm from that of his companion, and came forward to greet them, Rachel, instead of drawing back, or looking indignant, welcomed him as cordially as her cousin did.

Lord Vivian was an ordinarily good-looking man, fair, tall, and muscular; with as much brains as the majority, and a first-rate sailor. A man who might pass muster in a crowd of fools, but who would certainly not shine amongst wise men. A gentleman by birth and education, but no student, and with as much knowledge or appreciation of Art as a bull-dog. The sort of man who is turned out by Nature by the gross, and is to be met with so frequently in the world, that he seems to have been moulded after one universal pattern. He looked rather diffident when he first approached Miss Saltoun, but she soon put him at his ease.

"How do you do, Lord Vivian? I had no idea you were in Scarborough. Isn't it a charming place? One seems always to be meeting old acquaintances here. We ran against the Foleys and Captain Burrage yesterday."

"Will you permit me to introduce my friend, Captain Monserrat, to you and your cousins, Miss Saltoun?" said Lord Vivian, and then the Captain having fallen, quite naturally, between the two sisters, he sauntered by the side of Sir Henry and Lady Mordaunt, and, after awhile, they all got separated, and Rachel found herself alone with Lord Vivian.

"Only fancy," she exclaimed, eagerly, as she rejoined the party, "Lord Vivian is having his yacht, the 'Genevieve,' brought round to Scarborough. He expects she will be here in about a week, and then we must make some excursions in her. You'll come with us, won't you, Aunt Mary? I love yachting above all other things."

"I can't say I do, but your uncle will always be ready

to be your chaperon. But just now, you know, in September, it is rather apt to be stormy."

"Oh, I love the sea when it is rough," replied Rachel. "I should like to go out alone in a boat and drift—drift—wherever the waves chose to take me, over their crests, down in their depths—until they tossed me over the breakers into eternity."

"Rachel! Rachel! what are you talking of? You don't know what you are saying," cried Lady Mordaunt, alarmed at the girl's excited manner.

Ray's eyes, which had been flashing, became suddenly calm again.

"Don't I?" she said. "Perhaps not. I have gone wild, you see, in the air of this beautiful Scarborough. It intoxicates me so, that I don't stop to choose my words. And that illimitable space of ocean makes me think of nothing so much as the smallness of this life, and the magnitude of the next. When will the 'Genevieve' be here, Lord Vivian? I feel quite impatient to see her."

"My skipper said in about a week or ten days, Miss Saltoun, but should that prove too great a trial for your patience, I daresay we might manage to hire something in Scarborough that will suffice to amuse us till she arrives——"

Rachel did not answer him.

"Oh, there is the band," she cried, suddenly, as music struck up at the other end of the Spa. "Shall we go nearer to it?"

"May I offer you my arm?" said Lord Vivian. And Miss Saltoun accepted the offer and walked away with him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LORD VIVIAN.

"Now, what does all this mean?" said Sir Henry Mor-daunt to himself, a few weeks later. "What is it to end in? Is Rachel fooling this man, or does she mean to accept him when he proposes again? I must speak to her about it."

During the interval, Lord Vivian had constituted himself their constant companion, and Rachel had never made any objection to the arrangement. Accompanied by her cousins, she had yachted with him and his friend, Captain Monserrat; walked with them, and ridden with them.

The conversation had been general, but Lord Vivian's intentions were unmistakable, and the Baronet, having invited him to Scarborough, felt rather anxious with regard to the upshot of his experiment.

"Ray, my dear, can you spare me a few minutes?" he said, one morning, when the girls were all preparing to go out together.

"Oh, certainly, uncle," she replied; "but don't be long, there's a dear, for Lord Vivian and Captain Monserrat promised to meet us on the esplanade. We are going to race each other in bath-chairs; it is the most awful fun. The chairman who gets first to the other end has an extra half-crown. They go so fast, they nearly turn you out of the chairs altogether."

"It must be inimitable," said Sir Henry; "but ten minutes' delay will not spoil your pleasure. I want to ask you a question, Ray. What shall you say to Lord Vivian when he proposes to you?"

"Lord Vivian?" echoed the girl, arching her brows. "Why, he proposed to me last spring, and received his answer."

"A man does not accept such an answer as final, when

the lady continues to receive him on terms of intimacy."

"I don't see what difference that makes. Lord Vivian has risen in my opinion by his present behavior; he is evidently a man of sense. He has been told, most plainly, that his suit is hopeless; therefore he reassumes his former position of friend."

"I don't think you will find him as sensible in that respect as you imagine, my dear. Vivian is very much in love with you still, and your encouragement, by walking and boating with him, will make him reopen the subject before long."

"Dear me! how very dense men are! Why cannot he believe I was in earnest? I told him plainly that I should never marry."

"That is nonsense, Ray," replied her uncle, impatiently.

"Why? dear old nunkums. If I were resolved upon it then, I am still more so now."

"Then I shall ask why, in my turn, Ray. Why more *now* than then? Tell me the truth, child? Does anything more than your own obstinacy stand in the way of this marriage?"

"Uncle Henry, I told you my reasons for rejecting Lord Vivian's proposals in the spring. He is not good enough for me. He was not good enough then, and he is not good enough now."

"Is it that ridiculous idea about his fortune having been made through trade that is still haunting you?"

"Partly. It was made through trade, wasn't it? I should have thought you would have been too proud of your own name, Uncle Henry, to say nothing of the Saltouns, to wish me to become the founder of a family of booksellers."

"Rachel! your absurd pride aggravates me. Half the fortunes, nowadays, have been made by merchandise. Look at the Rothschilds, and a dozen other families. Besides, I have told you before, it was Vivian's grandfather who sold the books."

"And supposing it had been his father?"

"Well, it would have made the objection stronger, I admit, but not insuperable."

"And suppose it were himself, and he kept a book-seller's shop? Would you advise me to marry him then, and stand behind the counter, Uncle Henry?"

"My dear, that is a ridiculous argument. Lord Vivian does *not* sell books. That should be enough for you."

"But it's all the same blood. Selling the books did not make them unfit to mate with me, surely. And the father being Earl of Ilford, and the son Lord Vivian, cannot change them in my eyes."

"It should then. Cannot you see, Ray, that being a gentleman consists in education and breeding more than birth? And these men, having raised themselves to the society which *we* move in, have actually become our equals, whatever their antecedents may have been."

"No, I don't follow you in the least. And I have always told you I have a distinct objection to these mushroom titles. I'd rather marry a country squire with a pedigree."

"Some day, my dear, your pride will have a fall. Do you know, Rachel, that a branch of the Saltoun family is actually in trade to this day?"

"But we don't acknowledge them. They no longer belong to us. We considered the disgrace too great."

"Still, the fact remains, and wherever they may have settled, they are your flesh and blood, and nothing will unmake them so. However, if you have quite made up your mind about poor Vivian, for Heaven's sake don't play with the man any longer but put him out of his suspense at once."

Rachel leant for a minute on her parasol-stick, looking thoughtfully on the ground. Then she said slowly,—

"Very well, uncle, I'll give up my race in the bath-chairs. It is a great disappointment, for I am sure I should have won. I had picked out such a nice, strong old man. But the girls can go with Aunt Mary, and I'll write my letters."

She went up to her own room, but she did not write any letters. She sat down in an arm-chair instead, and tried to shut out the sound of music, and laughter, and singing that reached her from the esplanade, whilst she

asked herself once more, seriously, if she could make up her mind to marry Lord Vivian. And the answer now determinately, *No*. It wasn't the old story of the books, or any such nonsense. Rachel felt she would have waived all that if she had loved the man. But she did not love him. There was no sympathy between them; nothing but shrill laughter and idle jests and silly stories, culled from the comic papers. She did not deny that she had *tried* to like him, knowing how much he liked her. That she had tried to stamp down, or eradicate, that other fatal liking, by making the very best of Lord Vivian, and almost persuading herself that when he proposed again, she would accept him, and put the gulf of matrimony between her and Geoffrey Salter. But her uncle's plain speaking had opened her eyes. It had been all pretence. She would just as soon (if not a little sooner) marry his friend, Captain Monserrat. She could not be so untrue to her own heart—to all her firmest principles. Thank heaven, there was no necessity for her to marry. She need deceive no man in order to earn her board and lodging, and was free to cherish the love she could not strangle, if she so chose, to her life's end. But she must get out of Scarborough. The fact was patent. And it must be done quietly, and as soon as possible or Lord Vivian might forestall her intention, and come to the point at once. After having worked out the question in her own mind thus, Rachel made a letter, which she had received that morning from Miss Montrie, the public excuse for her change of plans.

"Uncle Henry," she said to him, privately, that afternoon, "I have been thinking seriously over what you told me this morning, and I *can't do it*."

"Oh, Ray! Ray!"

"Now, nunky, don't make the business harder than it need be. It isn't the books, dear, nor the mushroom peerage, but I don't like the man well enough. I'm quite determined about that. I shall require someone a deal better in every respect before I marry. So now, the best thing I can do is, to get out of Scarborough."

"But what excuse can you give, my dear?"

Ray drew herself up to her full height.

"What excuse do I need? Cannot I leave a place, when I am tired of it, without asking anybody's permission? But I must go before Lord Vivian hears of it, uncle, or he may take the opportunity to speak out."

"But where will you go, Rachel?"

"Oh, I've settled all that. I have been thinking of sending poor Miss Montrie to Aix-les-Bains. You know I told you how terribly she has been suffering from rheumatism. She is almost crippled, poor old thing. Well I shall take her there myself. And, then when she is better, we may travel on somewhere else. I have not been on the Continent for so many years, it will be quite a change for both of us."

"But you will return to Catherstone for Christmas, surely?"

Rachel shivered.

"I don't know. I have not made up my mind. Somehow, I don't feel so keen as usual about returning to Catherstone. I am "out on the loose," you know, uncle, and I feel very much like "kicking over the traces." Anyway, London must be my first halting-place. I shall write to Miss Montrie to meet me at the Victoria Hotel, and I suppose I can travel up to-morrow?"

"It is a very sudden resolve, Rachel, and I am afraid it will cause speculation."

"Never mind what they say when I am gone, Uncle Henry, only let me get away before there is a general explosion."

"Very well, my child, I suppose you must have your own way; but I am very sorry there should be any cause for your leaving us."

Lady Mordaunt and the girls were greatly disappointed when they heard Ray was going away, and considered it quite unnecessary that she should accompany Miss Montrie to Aix-les-Bains. But Miss Saltoun was resolute, as she could be when she chose, and only stipulated that they should hold their tongues on the subject, and not set all her acquaintances to try and dissuade her from her intention. Lord Vivian had never

alluded to her former rejection of himself, but had been perfectly friendly and at his ease with her.

Another stroll or two, Rachel thought, need not bring the matter much more forward, so that she would at least not excite injury by absenting herself from their usual visit to the Spa. But she reckoned without her host. Love is very keen-witted, and though she did not care a bit for Lord Vivian, he was very much attached to her. For days past he had longed to approach the subject nearest his heart, and ask her once more to become his wife. But Rachel's affected merriment had repulsed him. She had not appeared to have one thought of him, and he had not dared to risk a second refusal.

But this evening he perceived a difference in her. Perhaps it was the effect of her morning's cogitation, but she was more serious, more pensive, and more silent. She had a slight headache also, and refused to enter the theatre, preferring to stay on the Spa, with her uncle ; and, after a while, Sir Henry slipped away for light refreshment, and she found herself standing by the low stone parapet, looking over the moon-lit waters, and with Lord Vivian by her side. She did not suppose he was going to speak on any but the usual topics of Scarborough society. They had been so often alone during the last month, and he had never alluded to his own feelings. But presently, as Rachel heaved a little sigh, he said :

"Are you cold, Miss Saltoun?"

"Not at all, thank you."

"I am glad of that, for I want you to stay here for a few minutes. I want to speak to you. You *must* know what I am feeling for you. Have you not a little hope to give me now?"

Rachel was vexed ; she had planned so cleverly to avoid all this, and here she was a day too late, and should have to go through the whole business over again.

"I am sorry you have mentioned it, Lord Vivian. I gave you your answer long ago."

"I know you did. It has been rankling in my breast ever since. But then, we were not so well acquainted with each other. We had only met at balls and parties, and

such places, and it was presumptuous in me to expect a more favorable answer from you. But during this month I seem to have read you so clearly—to know you so much better, and, as a natural sequence, to love you so much more. Rachel! don't be angry with me for asking you again—will you be my wife?"

He was leaning with both elbows on the parapet, gazing straight up in her face; and seen thus, he was a very goodly man to look upon. She turned her eyes away, distressed and conscious.

"Oh, Lord Vivian, I wish you wouldn't ask me. I told you last April, when you did me the honor to approach the subject, that I shall never marry."

"Let me try and make you alter your mind. What is this insuperable objection you have to matrimony? You have everything, I know, that can make life happy; but you will find the need of a protector all the same. A woman cannot thoroughly enjoy herself without a husband to take her about."

"So you want me to marry you, in order to take me about?" replied Rachel, smiling.

"No, no; not without love. But cannot I teach you to love me?"

"I am afraid love does not come with teaching."

"Have you ever felt it, Rachel? Has no one had the power to provoke it in you?"

She did not appear to notice his question.

"I am not of a very loving nature, I am afraid," she answered; "neither do I imagine I should make a good wife. I have been my own mistress too long, and had my own way too much. I should never submit to control; I know it—I feel it. Therefore, marriage is not the state for me."

"Do you suppose I should ever wish to control you? You would be as free, as my wife, as you are now. And, dearest, if you would only think. You are beautiful, and you are still young; but the day will come when you will, perhaps, be neither. And then, if you have no home affections to fall back upon, how desolate and lonely you will be."

Rachel did think. She stood there with her serious eyes fixed on the rippling waters, and pondered. Was Lord Vivian right? Was this the way (though she had denied it so strenuously to herself) out of the tangle she had got her life into? Would children, and a matron's name, and the protection of a good man, cover up this ghastly wound in her heart—plug the bleeding—stop the aching, and help her to forget that it had been? She could not decide. She did not know. Only, at any cost, she must obliterate the memory of Geoffrey Salter.

"Don't you think you owe it to me to consider, Rachel?" went on Lord Vivian. "You must have guessed my intentions during the last month. You could not have thought that I would flutter round the flame on the certainty of being burnt. You must have seen that I cherished the hope of winning you after all. And I will try to make you so happy."

"I am sure you would," she said, in a strange, dreamy voice.

"I have done no 'doughty deeds,' in my time to attract a woman's admiration," he continued, "but the record of my life is at least a stainless one; and I would try so hard, for your sake, Rachel, to make the future something more. I say nothing about the mutual benefit of the connection, because I know you are above all such considerations. Besides, I love you, and I want you to love me. Everything else is worthless."

"But that is just where I fail, Lord Vivian," said Rachel, rousing herself. "I tell you honestly, I *like* you but nothing more."

"It will come, dearest. Only let me try to make it come."

"I don't think so; and you are too good to have your love wasted, or thrown back in your face again. And there are so many girls worthier of it than myself."

"I don't want those other worthier girls. I want *you*. That makes all the difference. Won't you say 'Yes'?"

"I cannot, Lord Vivian."

"Do not answer me at all, then. Take time to consider the question a little longer. A month—a couple of months

Don't chuck me overboard all at once, Rachel. Will you? Give me this little hope to cling to—that you will think again before you say 'No.' ”

“Will that not make the disappointment greater when it occurs?”

“No; for it shall not be a disappointment. I will pray night and day that it shall not.”

“It *will*, Lord Vivian. I am a heartless creature. There is no heart in me. I never seem to feel much about anything; and God knows how often I wish that I were dead.”

“*You!* You, so young, so rich, so envied? Oh, it is impossible! Rachel, you are morbid—you live alone too much. Marry me, and we'll travel the world over in search of amusement. I will not let you have such gloomy thoughts then. We will visit America, Australia, Japan, India. I will fit up a yacht like the 'Sunbeam,' and take you round the world. You want someone to look after you. Say you'll think of it. Only that—that you'll think the matter over before you finally make up your mind.”

Rachel gave a hysterical laugh, as Lord Vivian caught her hand, and pressed it warmly.

“Very well, then, I will think it over. I promise you so far. It is very little; there is no chance of my changing my mind. But, *I will think it over.*”

“Thank you—thank you, my dearest girl, a thousand times!” exclaimed his lordship, with a beaming face. “I will not worry you, indeed. We will go on just as we have been going on hitherto, and I shall be content to wait your time. But I shall be so happy, I shall not know if I am on my head or my heels.”

“I am afraid I have done a foolish thing. You seem so sure of my answer,” said Rachel, with a heavy sigh.

CHAPTER XXIV.

RACHEL RUNS AWAY.

SHE repeated the same words to Sir Henry Mordaunt a little later on, when they had all returned home, and the Baronet had retreated to his temporary smoking-room to enjoy his last pipe.

"Uncle Henry," said Rachel, as she crept in after him, and seated herself on his knee, "I'm afraid I've done a very foolish thing."

"In deciding to leave Scarborough, Ray? Very foolish indeed; alter your mind, dear, and resolve to stay with us till we return to town."

"No, nunky, it isn't that. What I have done makes it all the more necessary that I should go away. Lord Vivian spoke to me again this evening."

The Baronet gave vent to a low whistle.

"And you refused him again, of course? Poor fellow; I wish I had warned him to hold his tongue. He deserves a better fate than being even your ladyship's foot-ball."

"But—but, uncle," said Rachel, twisting the buttons of Sir Henry's coat, till they were in imminent danger of coming off; "I didn't refuse him—at least, not exactly."

The Baronet nearly jumped off his chair.

"You've accepted him, Ray?" he cried.

"No, no; nothing of the sort."

"Then, what the devil have you done?"

"Don't swear, or I'll tell you nothing. Lord Vivian asked me to take time to consider his proposal, and I said I would. He was so importunate, I was afraid he might make a scene on the Spa."

"But you will keep your promise, Ray?"

"Oh, yes," replied the girl, proudly. "I am not in the

habit of breaking my promises. But I told him it was of little use."

"Nonsense! the woman who deliberates is lost. Take a pencil, Ray, and dot down the advantages of this alliance on one side, and the disadvantages on the other, and you would soon see how foolish it would be to reject it. Vivian is an estimable young fellow, he will make you an excellent husband, and——"

"Yes, uncle; I have heard all that before," said Rachel, slipping off his knee, "and I only came in to tell you, because you have the best right to know it; and you will caution Aunt Mary that it is to be kept a secret, even from the girls. I shall go up to town to-morrow all the same."

"Did you inform Vivian of your intention?"

"No; because he would have tried to combat it, and I could not stay here under the circumstances. He would worry me for my answer every day—if not by word of mouth, by gazing pleadingly at me. It would make me say 'No!' at once, in order to get rid of him."

"You really mean to consider the matter seriously, then, Ray?"

"I really mean to think it well over, and to decide (if I can) whether a loveless marriage will be better than no marriage at all. It is bound to be the one or the other with me."

"But why, my dear child? Why cannot you love like other women?"

"I suppose I am not built that way, nunky. Any way, Lord Vivian shall have a fair field and no favor. And if I decide that I can't marry him, then I shall remain an old maid for the rest of my existence."

"You are a strange girl," replied the Baronet, "and sometimes I wonder what my poor sister would have made of you, had she lived to see you grow into a woman."

The ready tears rushed into Rachel bright eyes.

"Ah, uncle! don't speak of my sweet mother. Everything would have been so different if she had lived. I should not have been subjected to the same influences. She would have warded off temptation from me——"

"Temptation?" cried Sir Henry, startled.

"I mean, that I should not have been left to my own judgment, and my own devices in everything, as I am now. I am not very old, uncle. I am only a girl, after all, and, somehow, the world seems so hard and so difficult to steer oneself right in—and one's best feelings sometimes—sometimes——"

But Rachel could not finish her sentence, except by a few quiet tears.

"There, there," said Sir Henry, patting her shoulders, "I have never meant to blame you, dear child. You have a good heart. Listen to what it says to you and you will steer all right. I am glad you have made this little concession to Vivian, very glad, and shall be still more so, if it leads to a happy conclusion. But only for *your* sake, Rachel—only for your sake."

When she was gone, the Baronet sat deliberating by himself.

"What *can* be the reason of that girl's behavior? There's a man at the bottom of it. I'm sure of that. But who can he be? Rachel has always been so cold and reticent with men. Can she have learnt to care for some fellow, who has never given her a thought? Ah, well, this is where the mother's loss comes in. A woman would have scented the danger and prevented it. Poor child. She is like a boat with a broken rudder, and when the important issues of life are at stake, she dares not trust herself to decide them. With all her affectation of pride and self-management, she is only a girl, after all, and wants a mother's heart to whisper her secrets to. Poor little Rachel!"

Although this mental soliloquy appears almost ludicrous, as applied to the self-willed and arbitrary heiress, it was eminently true. Rachel felt as timid as a little child that night, as she crept up to bed, and lay awake in the darkness, longing so much that she knew what was best to be done for her own happiness and safety. After a while she rose again, and lighting her lamp, sat down and wrote the following letter to her lover:

"DEAR LORD VIVIAN,—I hope you will not be much disappointed when you hear that I have left Scarborough. It was my intention to leave to-day, before you spoke to me, and your speaking makes it doubly necessary. I am sure you will agree with me, that, if I am to weigh the advantages of what we spoke of, calmly and dispassionately, we must not meet again until I have arrived at my decision. Meanwhile, I beg of you not to hope too much. I confess candidly, that I do not know my own feelings with regard to you. I do not think I have any than such as are dictated by friendship. It was only my sense of friendship that made me accede to your request. If, upon reflection, I find I care for you more than I think I do, I will tell you so, honestly. If, on the contrary, I cannot find any reason for altering my present opinion, I will ask you still to look upon me as, Your sincere friend,

"RACHEL SALTOUN."

There was a train that left Scarborough for London very early in the morning—at about eight o'clock—and Rachel knew if she could start by that she would be well on her way before Lord Vivian had unclosed his eyes. So she roused the unhappy Mears, who slept next her, and set her at once to pack her boxes, and make all the needful preparations for her departure. Whilst Sir Henry Mor-daunt and his wife were yet in bed, Rachel, fully equipped for travelling, entered their room to wish them good-bye, and to leave the letter for Lord Vivian in her uncle's charge.

"What possesses you child, to go off in the middle of the night?" said Sir Henry. "Yet why should I ask the question, when you never do anything like other people?"

"I prefer to start early, uncle, and then I shall reach town in time for dinner. Give Lord Vivian my letter, but don't give him anything else, please. No hopes of your own invention. He has brought it on himself, but the end of this little game will be a checkmate. I am certain of it."

"I hope not, my dear. I hope you will prove to have more sense. Well! if you are going you had better go. You have only fifteen minutes to catch your train."

And thus it was that Miss Saltoun's visit to Scarborough was ended, and her grand scheme for knocking Geoffrey Salter out of her head resulted in confusion. Even as she journeyed to London, she felt she had only put off the evil day, and that without Lord Vivian's personal pleading, she should be quite strong enough to reject his suit. The mere fact of approaching the place where she and Geoffrey had first met—where she had received the shock of the intelligence which had separated them—made her feel that, though he might never come to the throne, *this* man was, by right divine, her king, and she should be his subject for evermore. As the train rushed with her towards the south, she lay back on the cushions of the railway carriage, with closed eyes, whilst she mentally recalled each look he had given her—each word he had spoken, each rebuke he had administered, and longed—oh, how she longed—to have the courage to take her fate in her own hands, and thank God for its sweetness and completeness. Such regretful thoughts did not tend to lessen the effect of fatigue and a lengthy journey, upon her; and by the time she reached London, Rachel looked ghastly in her extreme pallor.

A comfortable suite of rooms had been reserved for her at the Hotel Victoria, and the first sight her eyes encountered as she entered them, was the familiar form of Miss Montrie, waiting for her. The poor old lady's feelings were divided between gratitude for her recall to duty—excitement and agitation at their reunion—and nervousness lest by word, or deed, she should offend again. She came forward slowly and timidly to greet her young patroness, and proffered her hand, with as deep a curtsy as her rheumatism would permit her to perform.

"My dear Miss Saltoun," she commenced, "how very pale and tired you look! I hope you will like the fire. I ordered it, because the evenings begin to be chilly now, and the fatigue of travelling generally induces cold."

But Rachel had forgotten the circumstances under which she had parted with her old companion. She seemed to have forgotten everything, except that she was weary and perplexed, and Geoffrey Salter was lost to her, and here

was a familiar face which she had known from girlhood, and which had never looked on her otherwise than sympathetically. So, to Miss Montrie's intense surprise, she refused her offered hand, but fell on her bosom instead, and kissing her, exclaimed,—

"Oh! don't call me 'Miss Saltoun' any more! Call me 'Rachel,' Miss Montrie, for I feel as if I hadn't a friend in the world except yourself."

"My dear! my dear!" gasped the old lady, in her flurry and surprise. Such a speech, coming from the lips of Miss Saltoun, seemed like sacrilege to her.

"Yes! I mean it. I am tired and weary and sick of everything, and your face has just the touch of *home* in it that my soul requires. We will go to Aix-les-Bains," said Rachel, hysterically, "and when you are quite cured and jolly again, we will wander away together and see new countries, and forget that such a place as England exists anywhere."

This unexpected mood on the part of Rachel alarmed Miss Montrie. She could not understand what had happened to render the haughty and distant Miss Saltoun all of a sudden confiding and affectionate. But there are some women who (though they may never have had children) are born with mothers' hearts, and Miss Montrie was one of them. All her timidity vanished at the sight of Rachel's need, and she soothed the excited girl as if she had been a sick child.

"Come, my dear," she said, "and let me take you to your room. This long journey has overtaxed your strength. You will be much better after you have had your dinner."

So saying she trotted by Rachel's side into the bedroom, and having dismissed Mears, she disrobed the traveller herself, and brought her water to wash with, and brushed out her silky chestnut hair with her own hands.

"You see," she said, with a faint attempt at pleasantry intended to raise her companion's spirits, "that I am not quite useless yet, my dear, though my poor old hands are still crippled with the cruel rheumatism."

"We will remedy all that at Aix-les-Bains, Miss Montrie."

"Ah, my dear! and how am I to thank you for taking me there? And after the goodness you have shown me all through my illness, too! I am not worth it. Such an expense, and such a trouble. And after the way I vexed you at Catherstone."

"Hush! Don't speak of that. You make me feel so ashamed of myself. You did not vex me. It was all due to my ill-temper and my pride. And as for the rest, what is the good of my money, if I am to spend it only on myself? It is a heavy responsibility, Miss Montrie, of which I have not thought enough hitherto. If it can benefit you, I shall be only too glad. Now, let us go in to dinner."

Rachel did not recognize that, in speaking thus, she was only echoing the opinions which Geoffrey Salter had expressed to herself, and which had sunk more deeply in her heart than she had imagined. Little Miss Montrie was beaming all through the time of dinner, with the new satisfaction that had come to her; but Rachel consumed the meal almost in silence, and when it was concluded, she threw herself in a chair by the fire, and leant her head thoughtfully upon her hand.

"Won't you have some walnuts, Miss Saltoun?" asked Miss Montrie.

"Rachel! please, Miss Montrie."

"Oh! my dear girl, it seems taking such a liberty; and yet you make me so happy by insisting on it."

"It is a little thing to make one happy," replied Rachel; "and I wonder now that we could have lived so long together, and remained upon such formal terms. It was my fault for being so stuck up and self-opinionated."

"I cannot hear you blame yourself, my dear," said Miss Montrie. "You were always goodness and consideration to me, and it was that that made me forget my position, and overstep the bounds of duty."

"For which I deprived you of a home. Don't interrupt me. I see it all now as plainly as can be. My eyes have been opened. Someone—someone had the courage to tell me what no one else had dared——"

"Oh, my dear! who could have been so impertinent as

to speak to you on the subject? No friend, I am sure."

"Yes—yes! it was a friend," said Rachel, and then, overcome by remembrance, she broke down and exclaimed, "Oh, Miss Montrie! I have known trouble since I saw you last. A heap of trouble. And it has made me see my life in such a different light."

"Trouble! Oh, my darling! What, you? What trouble could come near you? What was it, Rachel? Surely there must be a remedy."

"No—no! don't ask me. I would rather not say. I have never hinted at it to anyone but yourself. And there is no remedy, Miss Montrie. None! That proves the worthlessness of riches or youth, or anything without the—the one thing which you want and cannot have."

Miss Montrie was silent. Her woman's nature suggested to her what the *one* thing that money could not buy must be, and she could only smooth Rachel's hand with a soft, caressing gesture, in reply.

"I wonder why I have mentioned my trouble to you," said the girl, presently, as she lifted her eyes from gazing in the fire, and fixed them on Miss Montrie's round face, looking almost comical in its anxiety and dismay: "only I have kept it to myself so long, until my heart seemed as if it would burst, and I have never met a soul to whom I could confide the truth, till now. I think you *do* love me, Miss Montrie. You used to say so once, and God knows I need love badly enough."

"I *do*, my dear, indeed, faithfully and affectionately. I always have. And it grieves me terribly to see you so low. But it will pass, Rachel. Sorrow does not last for ever."

"It will pass, of course," replied the girl, with a feverish laugh. "Everything passes in time. Besides, there is a chance of my being married, Miss Montrie. What do you think of that?"

"*Married!* Oh! my dear, to whom?"

"To your favorite, Lord Vivian. It is only a chance, though, and a very remote one. We met at Scarborough, and he renewed his proposals; and in order to keep him quiet, I promised to consider his claims for a month or

two. That is what you and I are going to do, whilst abroad. Sit in judgment on Lord Vivian's merits, and decide if I am to marry him or not."

"My dear, that is a question that no one but yourself can decide."

"Oh! I don't want to marry at all, you know," cried Ray, with affected gayety. "I could live quite happily at Catherstone all my life, with only you to keep me company. But Uncle Henry and my grandfather say it is imperative I should take a husband, for the good of the family. By the way," she said, breaking off in the middle of her subject, "*where* is grand-dad? Do you know, Miss Montrie?"

"He's in London, dear. I met him last week in Piccadilly."

"Did you? I must go and see the gay old masher before we go abroad. He would like to hear that there is a chance of my settling respectably. For I suppose that is what it will come to. I shall *have* to take the man. And if I owe it to society to marry, why not him, as well as anybody else? Oh, heavens! what a tangled puzzle this miserable existence is!"

The little old lady said nothing, but she laid her hand on Rachel's head, and gently smoothed down the shining, abundant hair.

Yet wondering all the while, with a very bewildered expression on her countenance, whether the trouble Rachel had first alluded to, and the trouble of marrying Lord Vivian, were one and the same, or two. Somehow she fancied the latter, for there had been a ring of despair in the first utterance, which had softened down to vexation in the second. Yet what could it be, thought Miss Montrie; what could it be?

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FAMILY ESCUTCHEON.

MISS SALTOUN did not really consider it necessary to let his Grace the Duke of Craig-Morris know of the agreement she had entered into with Lord Vivian ; on the contrary, she did not intend to tell him a word about it. She knew that in such a case he would never leave her alone until she had decided to marry her suitor. But she had, as we have seen, an immense respect and reverence for her father's family, *as* a family, and she considered it was due to the head of it that she should not pass through London without paying him a visit ; added to which, Rachel Saltoun felt very lonely, restless, and undecided at this period of her life. She clung to the old landmarks as she had never clung before, and experienced a feeling of safety in the presence of her relations, which left her as soon as she quitted them. She felt a comfort from Miss Montrie's little fussy attentions and coddlings, which she could not have believed possible ; they used to irritate and annoy her ; now she almost courted them ; but she started to visit her grandfather by herself. There was still the pride of race hanging about her to make her consider it more *convenable* that this interview with the Duke should be strictly private. She had not been used to confide in her grandfather. There was not much sympathy or affection between them, yet there was no telling what he might wish to say to her on this occasion. So, dressed very becomingly in one of her new autumn costumes, Rachel started for the Duke's chambers in Pall Mall.

She had naturally often been there before, and she had known the Duke's own man, Eaton, since she had been a child. She was, therefore, rather surprised to see the startled look with which he greeted her appearance, and

to hear the mysterious answers he made to her inquiries after her grandfather.

"Grandpapa is at home, of course, Eaton," she said confidently, as she descended from the cab.

"Well, miss, his Grace is within, but I am not sure if he can receive you."

"Is he ill?" exclaimed Rachel.

"Oh, no, miss; his Grace is pretty much the same as usual, but——"

"Not dressed yet, I suppose? I thought I should have found him up by eleven. However, I will wait till he is ready."

And she made a movement as though to go upstairs, but the servant placed himself before her and said, in a very deferential manner,—

"Miss Rachel, miss, pardon me, but please let me go up first and inform his Grace that you are here; he is particularly engaged this morning, and gave the strictest orders that he was not to be disturbed. Will you go back and sit in the cab, miss, till his Grace is ready to see you?"

"No, Eaton; but I will stay here till you have spoken to my grandfather. Of course, if he is really too busy to see me, I will return in the afternoon; but tell him I start for the Continent to-morrow, and have no time to spare."

She was aware that the Duke's financial affairs were not always in the most satisfactory condition, and thought it not improbable that money-lenders, or stockbrokers, or some such convenient acquaintances, were occupied in discussing with his Grace the best means of getting out of some monetary trouble.

At her bidding, Eaton disappeared, and, after a considerable delay, returned with the message that, since Miss Saltoun's time in England was so short, the Duke would receive her at once.

Rachel followed him briskly to her grandfather's presence, and entered the little room with a quick, firm tread. There was a determination of purpose, and a sharpness of intuition about this young woman, that made the Duke, at

times, a little afraid of her, and as she glanced round on entering, his eye followed hers nervously.

The old man was still clad in his furred dressing-gown, and seated at his breakfast-table close to the fire, and looked pinched, put out, and peevish.

"Well, grand-dad," exclaimed Rachel, as she laid her smooth cheek for a moment against his wrinkled one, which looked like a piece of shrivelled leather, "got rid of your friends, eh? I hope my coming has not inconvenienced you?"

"It is always inconvenient to receive visitors in the morning," replied the Duke, who appeared to be rather more grumpy and unamiable than usual, "especially for a bachelor. You should write beforehand when you wish to see me. I have told you so several times."

"Well, I am not the first visitor this morning, at any rate," said Rachel, pointing to another cup and saucer and some plates, which Eaton had removed hastily to a side-table, "and I had no opportunity to write to you, grand-dad. I only arrived in town last evening, and I leave to-morrow by the mid-day boat from Dover."

"And what is this mad scheme of going on the Continent, that Eaton mentioned to me? Who are you running after now? Do you travel alone?"

"Now, grandfather, is it likely?" demanded Rachel. "When have you ever known me do such a thing? My old companion, Miss Montrie, travels with me as chaperon."

"Oh! you've gone back to her now, have you?" snarled the Duke.

"Yes. And I am very sorry I ever gave her up; I made a very bad exchange. I suppose you have heard that I dismissed Mrs. Cranley before I went to Scarborough. Uncle Henry warned me against her, and I was a fool not to take his advice."

"You generally are a fool, my dear," replied the old gentleman, in the same pleasant voice. "And, pray, as you were at Scarborough, why didn't you stay there?"

Rachel could not understand the tone her grandfather adopted to her. He had never been cordial, nor genial, but to-day he seemed positively ferocious, and his temper

roused her spirit, always too quick to take offence at anything like contradiction.

"Why didn't I stay there?" she echoed. "Because I chose to come away. I suppose I am not bound to stay in one watering-place all the season, any more than I am bound to keep the same companion all my life. I am afraid you must have a fit of the gout coming on, granddad. However, the chief reason for my change of plan is that Miss Montrie had an attack of rheumatic fever this summer, which has left her very crippled, and I am going to take her to Aix-les-Bains, to see what the baths can do for her. That is the only thing which I have settled at present."

"And does Mr. Salter go with you?" asked the Duke, with a sneer.

At first Rachel could not believe her ears, and though her face flushed crimson, she bent forward, as though to listen.

"Who did you say?" she demanded.

"I thought I spoke plain enough," replied her grandfather. "I said the artist fellow—Salter, or whatever his name is. Is he to be one of the travelling party?"

Rachel's sudden color all faded away,

"Do you mean to insult me?" she said, in a low voice.

"Insult you? What insult is there in putting a simple question? The young man was down at Catherstone, almost living in your house, for a couple of months, during which time you were with him alone from morning till night. Would it be any worse if he travelled in your company abroad? I thought you might be bent on a sketching tour together, since you seem so fond of each other."

"Stop!" cried Rachel, vehemently. "Don't try me too far, grandfather, or I may say something that you won't like. Who has told you all this? Who has *dared* to try and come between us? But why need I ask the question, when I know the answer? It is that demon, Kate Cranley, who has done it out of revenge for her just dismissal for the bold manner in which she behaved towards the very man you are alluding to."

"Don't speak against Mrs. Cranley to me, Rachel," interposed the Duke. "She is a very good little woman, and the daughter of one of my oldest friends, Jim Aubyn, the best fellow that ever donned a gown. You may not have got on together—women seldom do. But I bet it wasn't *her* fault, and I won't hear you say so."

"Well, if you like to take her part against that of your own grandchild, do. But, however good she may be in your eyes, she will never disgrace Catherstone with her presence again. You may take my word for that."

"*Disgrace*, indeed!" exclaimed the Duke, warmly. "And which was the greater disgrace, I wonder; even supposing your story to be true, that she, an obscure, dependent girl, should flirt with a man who is her equal, or that you, a Saltoun, the descendant of nobles, the heiress of the Norreys, should stoop to associate with an artist, to make friends with a painter, a fellow whom you agreed with, for so many pounds, to daub the walls of your house? Why, you ought to be ashamed to look me in the face, and own it."

"Why should I be ashamed? What have I done wrong? Mr. Salter is a gentleman."

"Pshaw! A gentleman! You will tell me that Eaton is a gentleman next—or my tailor."

"And so I should if they disdained to do dishonorable deeds that a Duke stooped to. But there is no comparison between them and Mr. Salter, who is not only a gentleman by profession and manners, but raised above his fellows by a transcendent genius."

"Transcendent fiddlesticks. Did that justify you in spending whole days alone with him, gazing into his eyes, and listening to any twaddle he might choose to tell you? Ah, you needn't look at me like that. You have plenty of spirit, I daresay, miss, but you got it from me. Do you suppose I have not heard of your goings on? You are a disgrace to your family—to the name of Saltoun, and the sooner you change it, I say, the better."

"I shall not change it at your request, you may be sure of that," retaliated the girl; "and when I do, it will be to please myself and not my family. You are most unjust

to me, grandfather. I deny each one of your accusations. I have done nothing to blush for, nor behaved in any way unbecoming my father's daughter, and you will have to ask my pardon for the insult you have offered me before I consent to speak to you again."

"I ask *your* pardon?" cried the Duke, angrily. "Pray, am I not to say what I choose to my own grandchild? I repeat that you have disgraced our name (to say the least of it) to carry on a flirtation with this unknown fellow, of whose birth, I suppose, you are not even aware, and that if you don't drop it—yes, I mean what I say—if you don't (once and for all) drop this man's acquaintance I shall consider it my duty to acquaint your uncles with the facts of the case, and request them to kick Mr.—what's his name?—Salter, into the middle of next week. You can never make these sort of fellows understand unless you do kick them."

Rachel Saltoun's lip curled. She was trembling all over with suppressed excitement and anger, but she rose to her feet and stood opposite to the Duke, supporting herself by one hand on the table.

"I fancy," she said with clenched teeth, "that if either of my noble uncles attempt to follow your instructions, they will find Mr. Salter can give as good as he takes. He is a very muscular young man, in the prime of life, and I don't think it would take him long to make either uncle Albert or uncle Vesey 'see fireworks.' Don't try it, grandfather; you might be responsible for their lives. I had not any present intention of seeing Mr. Salter again. His work at Catherstone is finished, and we parted without making any engagement for the future. But, since you choose to believe any idle tale that a woman like Mrs. Cranley may bring you, it behoves me to prove you are in the wrong; and I shall take the earliest opportunity of asking him to visit me again. You will find it an unprofitable business to try and interfere with my acquaintances. When I *have* disgraced my name, it will be time enough for my relations to believe it."

And, with one proud look of defiance, Rachel turned on her heel and left the room. But, when she had hurried

downstairs and was in the street again, wondering vaguely what she had better do next, a kind of repentance came over her. After all, she said to herself, her grandfather was a very old man. He would be seventy-four on his next birthday, and she was going abroad, and they might never meet again.

She was afraid her speeches had been rather rude and abrupt. It was her way when anyone hurt her pride; and if that wretch, Kate Cranley, had really told him all he said to her, one could hardly blame him for believing it. And at this juncture a feeling of shame overcame Rachel Saltoun. For (when all was said and done) were the Duke's accusations untrue? It was horrid of Mrs. Cranley, of course, to have repeated the story, and she had evidently done so from a mean desire of revenge. But, were Rachel put on her oath, could she deny it? This remembrance made her retrace the few steps she had taken in the direction of St. James's Street, and enter once more the vestibule of her grandfather's chambers.

It was empty. Eaton was nowhere to be seen; so, without ringing the bell, she ran upstairs, and abruptly opened the door.

"Grand-dad," she commenced; but she got no further, for there—seated at the Duke of Craig-Morris's breakfast-table, sipping her coffee with the utmost complacency, and dressed in a rose-colored *peignoir*, with her dark hair streaming loose upon her shoulders, was—Kate Cranley.

Rachel started back at first in utter astonishment, a feeling which was evidently shared by the couple before her; but, the next moment, she had guessed the truth.

She had been very carefully sheltered from the knowledge of evil, and vice in its coarser forms had never been presented to her view. But she must have been worse than a fool not to know what the sight before her meant.

She gazed for a minute at the negligently-attired figure of Kate Cranley with the utmost scorn, and then turned like a fury upon the Duke of Craig-Morris.

"And it is *you*!" she exclaimed—"you who keep that woman here to your own shame and mine, who dare to accuse me of forgetting what is due to my family, and to

myself! You have let her wicked tongue traduce your son's child to you, and have been too blind to see that she was trying to whiten her own foul name by blackening mine."

"Rachel! Rachel!" cried the old man, "you should not break in upon me thus, without any warning. Go away, my dear child, at once, and do not come back until I send for you."

Even though he was angry with Rachel, and befooled by Mrs. Cranley, the Duke's pride of his family honor overcame all other considerations.

"Come back again!" she repeated, witheringly. "Never, until you have purged this place of the taint of that woman's presence. You may make your mind easy about that, grandfather. But never presume to speak to me again about lowering my family. Whatever I may be led to do in the future (and you may rely it will be nothing but what my conscience will approve to itself), remember what I have seen this day, and do not dare to express an opinion on my conduct, one way or the other."

She turned and quitted the room again, but the Duke came out on the landing in his furred dressing-gown, and tried to conciliate her.

"Rachel, my dear," he said, in a quavering voice, "you mustn't think too badly of your old grand-dad. This little breakfast for instance. It is quite an accident, you know; and not an unusual thing for a young lady to offer to pour out his coffee for a solitary old man like me."

"Oh, don't talk to me!" cried Rachel impatiently, with a contemptuous gesture of her shoulders.

"But, my dear," persisted the Duke, as he laid a detaining hand upon her arm, "I should not like the story of this little *contretemps* to be circulated in the family. My conduct might be altogether misinterpreted. People are always ready to believe the worst of a man in my position. I may trust you not to repeat it to Sir Henry Mordaunt, for example."

"I am too much ashamed of it to repeat it to anyone, grandfather," said the girl, in a sorrowful voice; "it is too overwhelmingly terrible to me. I wish I could forget I

had ever seen it. And I, too, who have been so foolishly proud of my family honor."

"Oh, this has nothing to do with the family honor," rejoined the Duke, fretfully. "You are too young, my dear; you do not understand. No one would attribute worse than folly to a man of my age for being still weak enough to succumb to the charms of your adorable sex."

Asher grandfather delivered this speech, with a desperate attempt at appearing gallant, Rachel looked at him with ineffable scorn.

"And you are the one," she said, "who, but a few minutes ago, was lecturing me for a supposed flirtation with an honorable man, as though I had degraded myself, because he may not carry four quarterings on his family escutcheon. Why, I'd rather marry an honest tailor, who had never done anything to blush for, than a king, if he could arrive at your age—seventy-four on your next birthday, grandfather—with no better sense of his responsibilities and the duty he owes to God, to his family, and his unblemished lineage."

And with this parting shot, Rachel flew down the staircase, and out at the open door.

The Duke of Craig-Morris stood where she had left him, dazed and dumfounded.

"I'm afraid I've made a mess of it," he soliloquized, scratching the back of his neck, after a fashion he had when he was perplexed. "Who ever would have thought the vixen would have bounced back again in that fashion, without a moment's warning? Now, every mad freak she may take it in her head to play, she will lay at my door. I shall never hear the last of the damage I have done to the family escutcheon."

And Kate Cranley had a *mauvais quart d'heure*, when he re-entered the breakfast-room, for having appeared upon the scene before the coast had been declared by the faithful Eaton to be entirely clear.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RACHEL ARGUES.

RACHEL did not go straight back to the hotel after that interview with the Duke of Craig-Morris. She wanted time to think, space to breathe in, action to calm down her perturbed spirit. She had been shocked, disgusted, degraded.

She knew her grandfather to be an irreligious and worldly man, but she had not believed him capable of open and flagrant immorality. And at his age, too—seventy-four! How it seemed to have pulled down, in one moment, all the respect she had tried to build up about his name, and to leave—instead of the worthy wearer of a ducal coronet, the head of an ancient family, and the progenitor of a numerous generation—a wretched, gibbering, old ape—the mummy of a man, a jest for boys, and a horror to all modest women.

She did not intend to say a word of what she had seen to anyone. She had rightly told the Duke she was too heartily ashamed of it. But it made her feel, somehow, as if he had disconnected himself from her by the morning's discovery—as if she had lost her grandfather forever.

Of the partner of his crime, Rachel did not think at all. She was beneath even her condemnation. She remembered the scene in the drawing-room at Catherstone, and felt that Mrs. Cranley was one of those ladies who are "all things to all men," and not worth a second thought. She was old enough to go her own way, and she had chosen the way to ruin.

It would not be long, Rachel felt, as she recalled her grandfather's dread of discovery, before she was on the world again, without a character or a home.

Miss Saltoun was in a cab as she pondered on these

things, and she suddenly directed the driver to take her to the International Fur Company's Offices in Regent Street.

The little round figure of Miss Montrie had flashed across her mind, and it seemed at that moment as if she were the only friend that she possessed. She would buy dear old Montrie a fur-lined travelling cloak to keep her rheumatic shoulders warm. It would be some panacea for the pain she was mentally enduring, to see the delight of the old lady at its reception. So the warm-hearted and impulsive girl pulled over half the wraps in the shop—finally fixing on an opossum-lined circular, that made a good hole in a twenty-pound note—and proceeded to drive home with her purchase.

If Miss Montrie's surprise and pleasure could have healed the wound in Rachel's heart, it would never have suffered more. As she entered the hotel sitting-room, and threw the wrap on the table, exclaiming—"There, dear old lady, what do you think of that?" her companion gave vent to a startled note of admiration.

"Oh, my dear, how beautiful!" she ejaculated, rubbing her fat little fingers in the thick fur; "what a magnificent cloak! The most sensible thing for travelling you could have."

"I'm glad you think so. But it isn't for me; it's for *you*."

"For *me*, Rachel?"

The poor woman could say no more. Her young employer's generosity and forethought overcame her. She drooped her head upon the opossum cloak, whilst tears fell from her eyes.

"Don't you like it?" said Rachel.

"*Like it!* Oh, my dear girl, what can I say to you? I cannot find the words. You are too good—too generous to me. You lay me under too heavy a debt of gratitude. But such a magnificent present, too! I have never worn anything so handsome in my life before."

"You will look like a fillet of veal on castors, when you are bundled up in it," said Rachel, brusquely, in an effort to dispense with Miss Montrie's thanks; "but I thought it would keep you warm and cozy on the journey."

"I have done nothing to deserve such generosity at your hands," continued the old lady brokenly; "no one but yourself would have taken me back, crippled and useless as I am. I feel so much how unfit I am to be the companion of a bright young creature like yourself. I can do so little to repay your kindness."

"You can be *my friend*," replied Rachel, in a low voice, "and that is all I ask of you. I have so few friends, Miss Montrie. I have proved it since we parted, and have often thought what a fool I was, not to appreciate you more. But we will never part again, unless it is by your own wish; I promise you that. Whether I eventually marry or remain single, your home shall be with me; and, if I die first, I will see you are not left unprovided for."

"My dear, *dear* girl! That will be quite unnecessary. I have always worked for my bread. I can do so still."

"What! with those poor, twisted fingers, of which I feel myself to be half the cause? For, had you not left Catherstone, you would not have caught rheumatic fever. You shall not have the opportunity of doing it again, dear Miss Montrie, for your future life will be my care."

As she spoke thus, and her gray eyes shone luminously, with divine compassion and sympathy on her old companion's face, Miss Montrie was suddenly inspired to say,—
"Rachel, my love! what has come to you since we parted? What has effected this astounding change? Forgive me, my dear, for mentioning it, but, though I always loved you, you were not given to feel for other people's troubles so keenly as all this."

"*What has come to me?*" repeated the girl, pushing her hair off her forehead as she was used to do whilst thinking; and though a flush rose to her cheeks, her eyes were very sad. "Why! I've had trouble myself, for one thing, and it has cleared many of the mists off my soul. I hardly believed in anything at one time, Miss Montrie, but I see more clearly now. And I feel there is no happiness in this world except that which comes from trying to make other people happy. There is none for ourselves. *None!*" she repeated, emphatically, as her sad eyes met those of Miss Montrie.

"My dear ! I don't like to hear you talk like that. One would fancy you were an old woman like me, and your day was past. All your life is before you, Rachel, and I hope there is a lot of happiness in it. What would Lord Vivian say to hear you speak so despondently ?"

"Oh ! don't mention the man's name !" cried Rachel, as she caught up the hat and gloves she had removed, and prepared to leave the room ; "I shall never marry him, Miss Montrie. The longer I am away from him, the more unpleasant the prospect of marrying him appears. I may as well write and tell him so at once. It will never come to pass."

"Well, I won't say any more," said Miss Montrie, smiling ; "for you know he has got me into a scrape before now. But whoever gets you will be a very lucky man, Rachel."

"Do you think so ? I don't," replied the girl, as she disappeared.

After luncheon, the subject of the Duke of Craig-Morris was introduced, and Miss Montrie asked Rachel if she had paid a pleasant visit in Pall Mall. Miss Saltoun's face clouded over.

"Not at all," she answered ; "grand-dad was cross and grumpy, and as usual we came to loggerheads. We never meet without quarrelling."

"He is a very old man, dear. Perhaps he was feeling ill."

"Oh ! he was well enough, the old sinner. But we are antipathetic. We cannot agree. He wants to rule me in everything, and I won't be ruled."

"What did his Grace say with regard to Lord Vivian ? Was he not pleased to hear that you have consented to weigh the merits of the case ?"

"I did not give him the opportunity. I never mentioned the subject. If I am to consider it fairly, it must be without bias, so I don't mean to talk it over with anyone except you. Miss Montrie," continued Rachel, as she sat down on a footstool on the hearthrug, and rested her clasped hands on the old lady's knee, "what is a gentleman ?"

Miss Montrie started as if she had been shot.

"What is a gentleman! Is it *you*, my dear child, the descendant of a line of nobles, that asks me that question? Why, who could answer it better than yourself?"

"But you don't understand what I mean. What is it that constitutes a gentleman? It cannot be titles or position, for my grandfather is one of the oldest Dukes in the United Kingdom, and I consider him a shocking old cad."

"Rachel! Rachel!" cried Miss Montrie, in a tone of shocked surprise.

"I know perfectly well what I am saying, and I repeat it. Neither his ways nor his manners are those of a gentleman. I have constantly caught him telling untruths, for example. Is that being a gentleman?"

"Putting his Grace altogether out of the question, my dear (for I should not presume to pass an opinion on so exalted a personage), the definition of a gentleman is generally supposed to be a man who could never stoop to commit a mean or dishonorable action."

The delivery of this commonplace sentiment seemed to have a marvellous effect upon Rachel Saltoun. Her eyes and cheeks glowed, and her heart beat rapidly.

"That is just what *I* think," she exclaimed, lifting her beaming face to Miss Montrie's. "What can the station in life signify, if the life itself be pure and honest? How many of the lives of aristocrats are open to the light of day? And yet they pride themselves on being 'gentlemen.'"

"I have always heard that Lord Vivian is a very blameless young man," observed Miss Montrie.

"Oh, Lord Vivian, yes! But I wasn't thinking of Lord Vivian at all," replied Rachel, fractionally; "and if you persist in dragging his name into the conversation, Miss Montrie, I shall take that cloak away. I am discussing gentlemen, *pur et simple*, without any reference to their position. Have you heard about Lady Frances Merivale?"

"No! What about her?"

"She has married one of her young men in her Bible Class."

"Impossible!" cried Miss Montrie. "What! a com-

mon lad? Oh, my dear! and to think you have shaken hands with her."

"Well! and why shouldn't I shake hands with her?" replied Rachel, sharply; "I would shake hands with her still, if I had the opportunity. What has she done wrong? Why shouldn't she marry him. She has no money, so he couldn't have courted her for gain."

"But, my dear, do you mean to tell me that Lady Frances has actually married a working man?"

"Actually and truly! I have not seen him; but I conclude there is something attractive in him, and that he is educated. He is a German, Heinrich Haspach by name, and—don't jump through the ceiling, Miss Montrie—he is a baker. I conclude that, like all his nation, he is musical, because you may remember how beautifully Lady Frances sings. He is younger than she is; but I hear they are wonderfully happy together, and they keep a baker's shop somewhere in the suburbs."

"Oh, Rachel! you shock me by the mere relation. What a terrible lowering of herself. I suppose her family will never speak to her again?"

"Well, her family consists of a horrible old father, who was divorced from her mother years ago, and a brother, who was turned out of the army for cheating at cards. I do not think Lady Frances had spoken to them for a long time past. She is very religious, you know, and spent all her time amongst the poor. Heinrich Haspach attended her evening classes, and they fell in love with each other. If she is happier in the baker's shop than she was living alone, I do not see why anyone should blame her. After all, marriage is a matter that concerns nobody but the two most interested. Is that not so?"

"My dear! where is all your pride gone? You have turned a regular little radical."

Rachel laughed, and then sighed.

"Have I? I don't think so. But perhaps I am not quite so bigoted as I was. One's eyes must be opened one day, you know. And it seems to me so unfair, that a man may be educated and clever—perfect in his manners, and pure and upright in his life; and yet, because his

ancestors have not been wealthy, and able, for generations past, to hold a foremost position in the world, all his genius and goodness should go for nothing to establish his claim to being thought a gentleman. Is *that* being a radical?

"Very much so, my dear. It is an attempt to equalize the classes—to pull down the old landmarks, which decree that the title of Esquire shall belong to those men only whose forefathers have exclusively borne arms for the King, without deriving their sustenance from trade."

"Is it? Then I'm afraid I *must* be a radical; or else Lord Vivian is not a gentleman. You haven't forgotten the bookseller's shop, have you?"

"Was it a shop?" asked practical Miss Montrie.

"Why, of course! How could they have sold their books, else? And I cannot see any difference between books and buttons."

"What did you say, my dear? Buttons?"

Rachel started.

"Did I say buttons? I must have been half asleep. Let us change the subject, and talk about our journey to-morrow. We shall have to leave Victoria by the ten o'clock train, so we must get to bed early to-night. I am going to be very strict with you until you are well again, and see that you are not over-fatigued. You must give up that bad habit of fetching everything for yourself, and let Mears wait on you. The courier is to meet us at the Dover station to-morrow. Mrs. Randall gives him an exceptional character, but I daresay he will turn out as bad as the rest. He will not be of much use to us whilst we are at Aix-les-Bains, but we shall want him afterwards. Do you know where I have a fancy for going, after Aix-les-Bains—that is if you quite recover your health there?"

"No, dear!"

"To Venice. I have always longed to stand in the city of palaces; there is so much romance attached to its very name; and it is the cradle of Art. But we must not go near it, unless you have quite got rid of your rheumatism."

"My dear Rachel! you must not keep on considering me in this manner," remonstrated Miss Montrie, "or I

shall have to throw up my engagement on the score of incapability. I am here for the purpose of accompanying you wherever you may choose to go, and if I cannot do it, I am unfit for the position."

"You will be able to do everything by-and-by," replied Miss Saltoun, kindly; "but until you are well again, it has become my duty to look after you."

Little Miss Montrie went to bed as happy as a queen that night; but she could not understand what had happened so to change Rachel Saltoun. The proud, haughty and reticent young aristocrat seemed entirely to have disappeared, and left a pensive, kindly-hearted and almost humble girl in her stead. The companion had not had much personal experience of love, or she might have guessed this sudden change was some of his handiwork. She hardly believed in its permanency at first. She fancied that the girl had heard a sermon, perhaps, that had lifted the veil from her eyes, and pricked her conscience, and made her anxious to repair the past; or she was uneasy in her mind respecting Lord Vivian, and the uncertainty made her less self-reliant. But that a few ordinary words, dropped without any intent from a young man's lips, should have worked such a wonderful transformation, Miss Montrie would have found very hard to believe. She took the goods the gods provided her, however, as they came, without speculating too much on their continuance in the future. But they did continue.

All through the journey Rachel treated her with the utmost consideration; and when they had settled down at Aix-les-Bains, she insisted on her companion having the best advice and the best attendance in the town; the result of which was, that in the course of a few weeks Miss Montrie had quite got rid of the remains of her rheumatic fever, and was her cheerful, good-tempered, rather foolish little old self again,—ready, from sheer gratitude and affection, to follow her patroness to the ends of the earth. Rachel and she had had many conversations about Lord Vivian by that time—conversations during which they had carefully weighed all the *pro's* and *con's* of what Miss Montrie considered a most eligible match. She could not imagine,

indeed, what any young lady could desire more. His lordship was young, good-looking, rich, well-mannered and agreeable. And the title of Lady Vivian, and by-and-by, that of the Countess of Ilsford. How euphonious and lofty they were. How well they would mate with Rachel's noble birth and aristocratic bearing. How suitable for the owner of such a magnificent place as Catherstone.

"Why, my dear," cried the enthusiastic old lady, "if you had had a man expressly manufactured for you by Heaven, you could not have expected more."

"Yes, I could," said Rachel, glibly. "I should have expected love to spring up in my heart at sight of him. And it hasn't, Miss Montrie. It never will. I acknowledge all the desirability of the match, but I feel like a lifeless log concerning it. No spark of fire falls from Lord Vivian on me. It is all mean, mercenary calculation."

"But *why*, my dear Rachel?" commenced her adviser.

"Oh, *don't* ask me *why*," exclaimed the girl impetuously. "I will think the matter all over again, carefully and considerately, and I will decide according to my knowledge. But never ask me *why* again. I don't know myself. I don't know anything, except that I am confused and irresolute, and—and unhappy."

CHAPTER XXVII.

UNDER THE TREES.

MISS SALTOUN was very fitful in her moods at this period, showing how her mind was tossed hither and thither by conflicting emotions. One day she decided to accept Lord Vivian, and the next she declared no power on earth should induce her to marry the man, and that if she did, she should run away from him in a fortnight.

Good, proper, little Miss Montrie, whose narrow mind had been cultivated in a perfectly straight groove, and who took everything that Rachel said *au pied de la lettre*, used to feel her cap rise off her stiffened hair with horror at some of Miss Saltoun's rash assertions.

"Oh, my dear, you cannot think of what you are saying. *Run away from him.* Heaven forbid. It would break my heart if you ever did such a thing. But you never would; you would think of your dear father and mother, and your noble grandfather."

"Now, Montrie, dear, don't talk nonsense. That's only my way of saying I can't marry him at all. But I'm going up to my room this afternoon to have a real, good think over the whole matter, and I'll tell you what I've decided on this evening."

And then she would join her companion at the dinner-table, with a smiling face, and say,—

"It's all right, Miss Montrie. I've made up my mind at last. I *will* be Lady Vivian, and I shall write and tell him so to-morrow."

But when, on the morrow, Miss Montrie would venture to ask her timidly if she had posted her letter, Rachel would shrug her shoulders and say,—

"No! I've changed my mind. I'm sure I couldn't stand him; he has such goggle eyes."

"But you must have known what his eyes were like all along, my dear."

"Perhaps; but I had evidently not thought sufficiently about them. The remembrance came on me like a shock last night. He will have to wear green spectacles, or take 'No,' for an answer."

Her companion regarded her in silent astonishment. She did not dare to remonstrate; indeed, she saw that all remonstrance was useless.

Miss Saltoun evidently did not know her own mind, or perhaps she knew it too well, and it was not a matter in which an outsider should have any voice.

The doctors of Aix-les-Bains considered that to make Miss Montrie's cure permanent, she should winter in a warm, dry place, and so Rachel abandoned all idea of Venice, and proceeded to Nice instead. This was a town where she had numerous acquaintances, and before she had been there many days, she was surrounded by a large circle of friends, who rendered her entirely independent of Miss Montrie's *chaperonage*—a circumstance which her nervous "watch-dog" greatly rejoiced at. Especially was Rachel pleased to meet a lady who had been a school-fellow of hers in Brussels, a Mademoiselle Elène de Vigny, now the Comtesse Gramont, at whose house she soon became a constant visitor. Madame Gramont's mansion was situated within a few minutes' walk of the villa which Rachel occupied, and where she would leave Miss Montrie, quite happy, with her Tauchnitz novel and her knitting, sitting amidst the roses and orange-blossoms, whilst she ran backwards and forwards to enjoy the society of her friend. She was walking back to the villa one morning by herself, slowly and musingly. It was close upon the luncheon-hour, and the promenade was deserted.

Nice was bathed in glorious sunshine; but Rachel's heart felt leaden, for in her hand she held a letter, received that morning from Lord Vivian, in which he begged, with all a lover's fervor, for an immediate answer to his suit. It was more than two months (he averred) since she had left him inconsolable, and he thought he had been very patient. Might he follow her to Nice? If her answer

was favorable, they might have such a happy time there together. But Rachel shuddered when she thought of Lord Vivian joining her. Her pleasures had not been very brilliant. Her enjoyment of all things seemed to have grown passive, but his presence, and in the capacity of a lover, would neutralize the little attraction Nice possessed. No! She must put at end to it at once and forever. She frowned as she thought that her inertia in the matter might have so involved it as to render her negative a more difficult task than she had anticipated. She should not have been so long making up her mind. She blamed herself for the moral cowardice which had made her put off the evil moment, for she had known from the beginning that this man could never become anything so close to her as a husband—no, nor any man, whilst *that man* lived.

Oh! why, thought Rachel, as she sank down on a green bench which stood under the shade of a spreading tree—why had she not been as brave as she boasted of being, and accepted the real happiness which lay within her grasp? What had she been afraid of? What signified her relations' disapproval, or the scorn of the world, or the shop in Broadgate Street? What signified, indeed, anything, so long as she had felt Geoffrey's heart beating against her own, and knew that they would be all in all to one another, and all sufficient for one another so long as their lives endured? And she had wounded him. She knew it. He saw her shrink from her natural impulse to love him as soon as she recalled his antecedents. He guessed she considered him her inferior—he whom God had gifted with a genius which raised him as a king above his fellows, and the hem of whose garment she should have felt herself unworthy to touch. And she did feel herself unworthy of him.

Rachel Saltoun acknowledged it now, as she sat on the green bench, dreaming of Geoffrey Salter's words of counsel and reproof, of his lofty principles—his stern sense of rectitude—and with it all, the gentle tone in which those words were uttered, the sweet, serious eyes that gazed at her the while. And as she remembered them,

Rachel uttered a sigh—one of those deep, audible sighs which burst with a vain hope of relief from an overladen bosom.

Someone heard the sigh, and turned at the sound—a man who had been sitting at the other end of the bench, with his back towards her.

"Is it possible?" he murmured below his breath; and then he ejaculated in a higher key, "Miss Saltoun!"

Rachel knew the voice at once, though for a moment it made her brain whirl, as if it were speaking to her in the dream which she had passed through.

"Miss Saltoun!" he repeated. "Am I mistaken?"

Then she turned, with a thousand delights sparkling in her eyes, and dimpling over her countenance, to greet Geoffrey Salter. But they faded as quickly as they rose, to give place to an expression of horrified concern. Was *this* the man she had parted with at Catherstone? She hardly recognized him, and the hand she placed in his was utterly unresponsive.

All the bloom of his youth was gone. Instead of the soft skin and fresh complexion, which had been amongst his greatest personal attractions, his face was yellow and dried looking. The hair on his forehead was thinner, and was without lustre, and his figure had much fallen away. The only things about him which remained unchanged were those wonderful dark blue eyes which had penetrated her soul to the very depth. As she recognized him, Geoffrey Salter smiled faintly, and at that Rachel found courage to speak.

"Oh, Mr. Salter!" she exclaimed, "I never expected to meet you here. But what is the matter? You are ill. I can see it. What have you been doing to yourself since we parted?"

Her voice rang with such true concern, that Geoffrey Salter hastened to assuage her fear.

"I *have* been ill, Miss Saltoun, but I am all right now."

"Are you? You don't look so to me. You are so thin and so—so—altered," said Rachel, with *larmes au voix*, which she could not disguise.

The young man laughed.

"Yes; I believe I look rather like a scarecrow, but I am quite fat to what I have been. I had a touch of malarial fever in Florence last month, and it has reduced me terribly; but I am convalescent, I assure you. I am getting well as fast as possible, though it is very good of you to look so concerned about the matter."

"Oh, I cannot help feeling concerned," replied Rachel, with a sob in her throat. "The surprise of meeting you here, and seeing you look so ill. Are you staying in Nice, Mr. Salter?"

"Only for a few days. I have been travelling with my friend Captain Alfred Trentham, and we intend to winter in Algiers. I hope to get some good subjects for my pencil there. My sketching in Italy has been all knocked on the head by this tiresome illness. However, we must take the thick with the thin in this world."

"And you—you—have had no one to nurse you, I suppose," said Rachel, timidly.

"Oh, yes, thanks. Trentham is an excellent nurse, and has been most devoted to me all along; but I consider myself quite out of his hands now. He is at Monaco for the present, whilst I am resting here. Next week we start for Algiers. But you have been ill yourself, Miss Saltoun, surely. You seem thinner and paler to me than you were at Catherstone."

At this accusation Rachel colored furiously.

"Am I? But I am perfectly well, I assure you. If I have grown thinner, it must be from too much dissipation and enjoyment. I have been tremendously gay this summer. I have been spending it at Scarborough with Sir Henry and Lady Mordaunt."

"I know. I have heard all about your being at Scarborough."

"Why, how can you have heard it?" asked Rachel, with open eyes.

"Do you suppose that the doings of a fashionable young lady like yourself can remain a secret? I know more than that, Miss Saltoun. I know that I have to congratulate you on your approaching marriage with Lord Vivian, and I do so most heartily."

If Rachel had been scarlet before, she became pale as death now.

"Your congratulations are premature, Mr. Salter," she said, haughtily. "I am not going to marry anybody that I am aware of."

He looked up hastily.

"I hope you don't think me impertinent for mentioning it. I should not have presumed to do so, had I not heard the news for a certainty."

"May I ask who was your informant?"

"Indirectly, Lord Vivian himself. He is an intimate friend of Captain Trentham, and corresponds with him. The announcement of his engagement to you came in one of his letters, and Trentham, knowing that I had been professionally engaged at Catherstone, communicated it to me. That is all."

"And it is a great deal too much," exclaimed Rachel, angrily, "as Lord Vivian will find out before he is many days older. The fact is, Mr. Salter, that his lordship proposed to me again at Scarborough, and I said I would consider the matter. There has never been any engagement between us. It is an indirect untruth."

"I suppose his wish was father to his thought," said Salter, with apparent indifference. "And perhaps the announcement was only a little premature. You must not be angry with him for that."

"But I *am* angry, and the announcement is not only premature, it is untrue. I said I would consider his proposal, and I have considered it, and——. But, oh! why should I tell all this to you?" cried Rachel, breaking off short.

"You have considered it, and your decision is——" said Geoffrey, interrogatively.

"That I never shall marry him. I don't want to marry any one. I told you so at Catherstone."

At the mention of Catherstone, the remembrance of the interview that took place between them there flashed back on both, and they grew hot and red together.

"Yes; I have forgotten nothing you told me at Catherstone," said Geoffrey, presently. "But I thought you

would change your mind when the right man came."

"Well, Lord Vivian is not the right man; I am quite satisfied on that score; and I was going to write and tell him so this very afternoon. Why, I left Scarborough only to get rid of him."

"And are Sir Henry and Lady Mordaunt with you here, Miss Saltoun?"

"No; I am alone—that is, unless old Montrie can be called anybody."

Mr. Salter gave a start of pleased surprise.

"Is Miss Montrie with you again? The old lady who was impertinent, if I remember rightly."

"Whom I said was impertinent, you mean," replied Rachel, looking very much ashamed of herself. "Yes, she is. Mrs. Cranley and I didn't get on together, and I was compelled to get another 'watch-dog;' so, to save myself the trouble (I'm a very lazy girl, you must know), I sent for old Montrie back again."

"One thing I know," replied Geoffrey, "and that is, that you always make yourself out to be worse than you are."

"Do I? That shows that I am too clever for you, Mr. Salter. However, Miss Montrie and I are established, *pro tem.*, at the Villa Fontine. It is a pretty little place, with a sunny garden on a slope. Will you come and visit us there? As your friend is at Monaco, you must be rather lonely; and Miss Montrie will be so charmed to coddle you up. She is a regular old flirt, and loves young men."

Geoffrey Salter smiled languidly.

"It is very good of you to ask me," he said; "but I think I had better not. I am good for nothing but to sit still, and should be a nuisance to strangers."

"Do you regard me as a stranger?" asked Rachel, reproachfully.

"No, and never can! That is one of the reasons that I had better stay away from the Villa Fontine."

"Some time ago," said Rachel, slowly—"you may remember—I asked you to be friends with me, and you said 'No.' But that was four or five months ago. Don't you think we might try to be friends now? The time

and place and circumstances are all so changed. You are sick, and need a little comfort. And I—I, too, am not very happy or joyous. And I have much to tell you. *Won't you come and see me?* ”

As the words dropped pleadingly from her lips, the young man, looking up, saw Rachel's color coming and going in fitful rushes, and a wild hope rekindled in his breast.

“I *will* come,” he said, suddenly; “perhaps I am a fool, but I cannot resist your invitation, Miss Saltoun. It will be such a pleasure to have one of our old chats again.”

Her face lighted up like a sunbeam.

“And when will you come?” she exclaimed, joyfully. “Now?”

Geoffrey laughed.

“No, not now! You will frighten Miss Montrie if you introduced her to such a scarecrow without some preparation. Besides, I did not expect to meet anyone I knew, and am only dressed for a morning stroll.”

“Will you come to dinner to-night, then?”

“Will it really give you pleasure to see me, Miss Saltoun?”

“It will give me the sincerest pleasure.”

“Then I will come.”

“And I shall expect you at seven. Good-bye.”

They rose, and she held out her hand, and he pressed it so warmly that the blood welled up from her happy heart to suffuse her cheeks, as she turned hastily from him, and went home as if she trod on air.

“This time,” she thought to herself—“this time, if he affords me the opportunity, Geoffrey shall not hear me give the lie to my own heart again.”

She entered the luncheon-room at the Villa Fontine, so blooming and excited, and so different from what she had been when she left home for Madame Gramont's, that her companion could not help remarking it.

“My dear,” she exclaimed, peering over the top of her spectacles, “what has happened to you? You are positively beautiful this morning.”

"There's a left-handed compliment," cried Rachel merrily, as she kissed the old lady. "But I don't mind telling you the reason. I have refused Lord Vivian for good and all."

"You have refused the poor gentleman, positively refused him? But when, my dear?"

"To-day, since I returned home. I only wrote a couple of lines to say that I *had* considered, and it was not a bit of use, and I had definitely decided to refuse all offers of marriage for the present. And I sent the letter to the post at once, for I knew if it were in the house you would try and make me alter it."

"Oh, no, my dear Rachel! I would not think of taking such a liberty. And now, that it is over, I am really glad you have decided as you have. I am afraid you would not have been happy with him."

"I am *sure* of it," replied Miss Saltoun, bluntly, "and I ought to have told the man so from the beginning. It would have ended in murder. And now, what are we going to do this afternoon, old lady?"

"Perhaps you had better drive, dear, as you are engaged to go to the opera this evening."

Miss Saltoun knitted her brows.

"Am I engaged? I don't remember."

"Why, you bought a box yesterday, and said you had promised to take Mr. and Mrs. Saunders with you."

"So I did. What a nuisance. But I don't feel like going to-night, so enclose the box to Mrs. Saunders, there's a dear old thing, and say I am too tired to accompany them."

"Oh, my dear! *Are* you so tired, and when you look so blooming, too?"

"I'm only tired of the Saunders, Montrie dear, but you needn't tell the lady so. Write the note at once, and then come out for a long country drive with me. I feel as if a load had been lifted off my heart, with that letter to Lord Vivian. It is bearing all my trouble away with it. Let us go and make fools of ourselves together."

She danced out of the room as she spoke, but after a minute, popped her head in again.

“By the way, Miss Montrie, do you remember my speaking to you of a Mr. Salter, an artist, who painted my drawing-room panels at Catherstone? I met him as I was coming home this morning. He has been very ill with malaria, and is alone in Nice, so I asked him to come to dinner to-night. Mind we have a nice one.”

And with a nod, Rachel disappeared again.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A PROPOSAL.

GEOFFREY SALTER appeared at the Villa Fontine at the appointed time, but he did not look nearly so bright and hopeful as when he parted from Miss Saltoun on the Esplanade. Perhaps the long, enervating day had been rather trying to an invalid, but half-recovered from a serious illness, and he was feeling languid and fatigued from its effects. Perhaps he had been thinking over the morning interview, and coming to the conclusion that he was a weak fool to place himself voluntarily in the same temptation from which he had already suffered so much. For he *had* suffered terribly. He was too proud a man to "wear his heart upon his sleeve for daws to peck at," and too brave a man to try and lay his private burdens on the shoulders of his friends; so that none but himself had guessed the struggle he had gone through in his endeavor to trample his hopeless passion for Rachel Saltoun under foot.

In their different ways, and according to their different natures, these two young people had been passing through much the same experience. Only Geoffrey's had been the fiercer battle of the two, as his temperament was the warmer, and his feelings the least easily disturbed.

He had not frittered away his youth in senseless flirtations, or vicious pleasures. He had led a clean life, such as was fit for a man who had set up the loftiest ideals as the ambition of his soul. He did not believe in visions of purity and excellence coming to one who made a god out of his self-indulgence. So when, unconsciously to himself, his heart had slipped from his own keeping into that of Rachel Saltoun, he felt it was useless to attempt to recall it.

All he could do was to combat with the lower impulses

of his manhood, and to let the higher purify him still higher, to whatever extent they might go. But the trial had been a very bitter one to him, and his mental conflict had had a great deal to do with the illness that prostrated him.

Captain Trentham, who honored Geoffrey Salter as one of the best and cleverest fellows he knew, guessed but too easily, during the nights he watched him through his delirium, that a disappointment in love lay at the bottom of his fever, and that an overtaxed brain had made him an easy prey to the Florentine malaria. But who the object of his adoration was, Geoffrey Salter never revealed.

He kept his secret faithfully, and his friend never questioned him on the subject. But he prayed him to winter in Algiers with him, hoping that time, and absence, and change of scene might work a complete cure before Geoffrey saw England again.

It would never do, thought the wily Trentham, to have the brain and the brush of the coming Royal Academician half-paralyzed for the sake of anything so worthless as a woman.

Dear old Geoffrey must go to Algiers and forget all about his trouble. Meanwhile, he left him for a few days alone in Nice, and Rachel Saltoun asked him home to dinner. He came (as has been written), looking fagged and listless. Miss Montrie, who had worshipped, with the rest of the great B. P., at the shrine of "The Awakening of the Soul," was prepared to receive the hand who painted it, with the utmost deference. She had expected to see a handsome, elderly man, with thought and experience written on his brow, and was quite taken aback by the entrance of a sallow, languid-looking boy, with nothing handsome about him, except a pair of dark-blue eyes.

"My dear Miss Saltoun," she said, hesitatingly, "is this gentleman the—the——"

"The painter of the famous Academy picture, Miss Montrie, would you say? Certainly he is. What is your objection?"

"Oh, my dear! Objection! But you will always have your fun with me. Only, Mr. Salter appears so very young to have already achieved such a position for himself."

"Ah, well, you must fight that question out together. I don't think I am quite clear as to Mr. Salter's exact age myself. But what we are all most concerned about just now is our dinner. Do you think there is any chance of persuading the cook to let us have it to time?"

At this hint Miss Montrie bustled away to superintend the house-keeping, and as soon as she was gone, Rachel wished she had prevented her departure. The girl appeared very charming that evening, and it pained Geoffrey even to look at her. The pensive droop which her mouth had acquired of late, the sad, pathetic glance of her eye, had vanished as if by magic, to be replaced by a serious smile, a humid light, a timid air, and a faint blush, that all became her admirably. She had attired herself in white, and wore large bunches of her favorite Neapolitan violets in her bosom and at her waist, and altogether she was so sweet that poor Geoffrey wished, more than ever, that he had not come. He became silent and absorbed, and Rachel grew nervous, and tried to cover the feeling by talking rapidly.

"It is so good of you to come and see us, Mr. Salter, and I hope the exertion has not been too much; you look so pale and tired. Do have a glass of sherry and bitters before dinner. I know the sherry is all right, for I brought it from Catherstone. Don't move; let me bring it to you. You are an invalid, you know, and must consent to be waited on."

Then, as he accepted the glass of sherry and bitters from her shaking hand, she ran on again.

"Well! what do you think of Miss Montrie? Is she not just as I described her to you? But she is goodness itself to me, and I owe you a thousand thanks, Mr. Salter, for having opened my eyes to her value. I should never have begun to think of it if it had not been for you; in fact, you made me think about a heap of things."

And here Rachel paused with a sigh.

"You undervalue your own powers," replied Geoffrey Salter, "for I do not recollect that I ever said anything to you that you could not have said with twice the effect yourself."

"*Don't* you remember?" said Rachel; "but I *do*."

At this moment the dinner was announced, and Geoffrey had to offer his arm to Miss Montrie, and conduct her to the dining-room. During the meal the conversation languished terribly and almost died. Never was there a more funereal dinner-party. Geoffrey played a miserable part with his knife and fork, and all Rachel's appetite seemed to have fled. Only little Miss Montrie partook industriously of all that was set before her, and supplied the place of conversation with her own chatter.

Once or twice she looked up suddenly, surprised by the silence of her companions, and caught Miss Saltoun gazing at Mr. Salter, or Mr. Salter with his eyes fixed upon Miss Saltoun, and thought it a very strange proceeding for two people who knew so little of one another. At last, however, the unsatisfactory meal was concluded, and they adjourned to the drawing-room, which opened on to the terrace garden. Miss Montrie, remarking that the night air was very dangerous, closed all the windows, and retiring to a sofa with her book, was soon fast asleep, and giving audible notice of the fact. Rachel glanced at Geoffrey.

"Are you afraid of the night air?" she asked.

"Not a bit. Are you?"

"Oh, no! Sometimes I sit out on the terrace till quite late. But with your fever?"

"I assure you the fever is quite past, and all I need now is to recover my strength. If you feel inclined to go out into the garden, I shall be delighted to accompany you."

She passed from the room then in silence, and he followed her, and from the vestibule they stepped out upon the terrace. It was still light. The hues of the flowers had assumed a duskier shade, and over them hovered a kind of misty blue cloud; but the atmosphere was warm, and the air was perfumed with the scent of roses, violets, and orange-blossoms.

"What a heavenly climate !" exclaimed Rachel, as they stepped down upon the garden path. "To think that we are only distant from England by a few hours, and that *there* it is all fog and damp and cold, and here sunshine and perfume."

"Yes. I suppose poor old Catherstone must have been looking rather forlorn when you left it, Miss Saltoun?"

"I have not been to Catherstone since you have," she rejoined quickly.

"Not since then? I thought you were so attached to the old place."

"So I was. So I *am*, I mean; but I had no time to run down there as I was passing through town. Besides, I am sure that it must be looking as you say, most forlorn. It would give me the blues."

"Have you been painting much lately?"

"No! I haven't touched a brush. I don't suppose I ever shall again. I am sick of it. I told you once that I am very fickle in my fancies."

"I am afraid you are. However, you can afford to be. I wonder what would become of us poor artists if we painted one day and kicked our easels to one side the next?"

"You would never make the grand names you do; that is all," said Rachel.

"Or (perhaps, to put it more justly) we should never be artists, unless the feeling to succeed was too strong within us to permit of anything interfering with it. The divine afflatus is like love," continued Geoffrey, with a sigh. "It is not to be taken up nor put down for a man's convenience. But may I say that I hoped better things of you? Your efforts are really so promising that you should persevere. With perseverance (as I always told you) you will draw well in time."

"I shall never do anything well," cried Rachel, passionately, "because I lack patience and humility, and all the other virtues. I am like a rudderless boat at sea, tossed hither and thither, at the mercy of the waves. I do not know my own mind for two seconds together. My

pride ruins everything. It has marred my life, it has ruined——”

But here Rachel stopped short. She had been talking vehemently and without discretion, and had stepped nearer the precipice than she intended. Geoffrey came to her rescue. He had no wish to have a repetition of the scene at Catherstone.

“I understand exactly what you mean,” he said; “but I repeat that you judge yourself too harshly. Very few people work systematically who are not driven to it by necessity. I can quite understand that a life like yours is so filled up with the demands of friendship and the duties attendant on your property, that it leaves you very little leisure for the pursuit of accomplishments. Still, the time may come when you will be sorry you have not followed my advice. Life is not *all* roses, you know, even though one may be surrounded by every possible luxury; and there are periods (though I trust they will be few and far between in your case) when we are thankful to turn to work as a distraction to thought.”

“Does it distract yours?” asked Rachel, significantly, for she was longing for an opening to tell Geoffrey she regretted what had passed between them. But he was not used to artifice, and did not understand her meaning.

“Oh, yes,” he said, fervently; “it has been, from the very commencement, my greatest earthly panacea against trouble. Whilst I paint I remember nothing. When I remember,” he added, in a lower key, “I cannot paint.”

“I wish I could find the waters of Lethe in anything,” observed Rachel. “You see, I tried to do so in Lord Vivian, but it was an utter failure.”

“Yes; it was rather a rash sort of cure. I thought you were a more sensible young woman than that comes to. When I heard the news I imagined, naturally, it was a love match.”

They had reached the bottom of the garden by this time, and were sitting on the low, stone balustrade that surrounded it. The dusk was falling rapidly, and the air was full of winged creatures flying after one another. A trailing yellow rose grew over the parapet, and hung in

wreaths above the road beneath, and, as Geoffrey Salter spoke, Rachel caught up one of the long trails of blossom and held it against her face, lest, even in that fading light her companion should mark the changes in it.

"Did you," she ejaculated slowly—"did you *really* think it was a love match, Mr. Salter?"

"I had too high an opinion of you to think otherwise; especially after all you had said to me on the subject of marriage."

"And now your opinion is lowered?"

"I did not say that. I do not even think it. You tell me it was an experiment, and that it failed, which proves that you are too high-minded to do what your sex does daily, that is, to marry without love. I am glad, therefore, that it did fail, for *your* sake."

"*Only* for my sake?" said Rachel, interrogatively.

"Why do you torture me with the question, Miss Saltoun? You know the answer. You know that, hopeless as I am, I could not be glad to see you marry another man; it would be against nature. Still, believe me when I say that I desire nothing so much as to see you happy, at any cost."

"*Happy!* reiterated the girl, bitterly. "I shall never be happy. I shall be miserable all my life."

And as she said it there was a sob in her throat, which Geoffrey could not fail to recognize.

"Dear Miss Saltoun," he said, drawing nearer to her; "Rachel! let me speak to you as a friend. I can see that you have suffered—that you are, perhaps, still suffering. Our luckless meeting has been productive of regret for both of us. But listen to me; there is no reproach mingled with it; that must be our consolation. It was not our fault, neither yours nor mine, unless, indeed, I should have been wise enough to know there was danger in lingering near you for so long. The barrier between us is not of our raising, but I see plainly it is insurmountable. It is of iron, and we should only wound ourselves further by beating our heads against it. Well, then, cannot we turn the trouble to some good account? We did not seek it, therefore it was sent us, perhaps, to keep our spirits from

being too self-confident and hopeful. Do try and look at it in that light; I cannot bear to see you so subdued, so unlike your old self, and I cannot help guessing the reason. You will not let me carry away so sad a memory, will you? It would haunt me in my solitude."

Rachel shook her head, whilst the tears fell on the branch of roses in her hand.

"I cannot get over it," she said, with a little gasp. "You say it was no one's fault, but I feel it was mine. I brought it on both our heads; and *you*, whose genius I envied and admired so much, I have made you unhappy, I have ruined your life."

"No, no; don't think that," he interposed, eagerly. "No one can do that, so long as my conscience is clear. Even when this illness fell on me——"

"Did I bring that upon you, too?" she cried.

He smiled sadly.

"Well, I have not concealed from you that I have suffered—how could I help suffering? And I suppose the state of my mind had an effect upon my body and predisposed me to sickness. There is nothing very uncommon in that."

"And it was only my wretched pride and self-sufficiency that stood between us."

"No, Miss Saltoun; you must not say so. There was a great deal more. Don't imagine, because I am proud of my parents, and not ashamed of my birth, that I consider myself 'socially' your equal. I know that I am not. Perhaps, I do not wish to be. Perhaps, I would rather owe my distinction in the world to my industry, and such talents as God may have given me, than to a name with which I had nothing to do. Still, the fact remains that there are grades and classes on the earth, and will endure as long as it does. It is our mutual misfortune that we have been born in different spheres, and that between us there is a great gulf fixed. But it is not your fault or mine."

"Can't we bridge over the gulf some way?" said Rachel, in a low voice.

Geoffrey Salter's heart began to beat to suffocation.

"Oh, Rachel! be careful what you say!" he cried. "Don't trifle with me, for God's sake! Remember your family and the prejudices of your class! Would your love be strong enough to surmount such formidable obstacles as these?"

"We might be so happy," she sighed.

"Happy! I, for one, should be in Heaven. But it is for you to speak. You are a princess, and I am a commoner. I dare not say the words that are trembling on my lips. There was a moment—you cannot have forgotten it—when you said, 'Geoffrey, I love you!' I have thought of that night and day, in fever and delirium, in weakness and solitude. 'Geoffrey, I love you!' If I could hear your sweet voice speak those words again, seriously, and deliberately, with your hand in mine, I think I should go wild with joy!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

A REJECTION.

FOR answer, Geoffrey Salter felt a trembling and rather cold hand slide into his, whilst Rachel leaned her head towards him, and whispered, "I love you."

What wonder then that all his good resolutions melted into air, and that for the second time their young lips came together, and sealed what seemed to be the consummation of their happiness. And with it, Rachel's reticence dispersed.

"Oh, Geoffrey! Cannot we get over it?" she murmured, as she nestled against him in the gloaming. "All this wretched prejudice and vulgar talk. I have been so miserable without you. My life has not seemed worth living. All my sunshine went away with you from Catherstone."

"My darling! and do you suppose I have not been miserable, too—twice as miserable, perhaps, as you, Rachel?—for you had the power to call me back at any moment, and I could only stand aloof and wait, hopeless of ever seeing you again. Did you ever think of calling me back, Ray?"

"Oh, often—often! But then the fear of my people, and of what they would say, deterred me. I have been brought up very conservatively, Geoffrey. I confess I am full of prejudices. And it would wound me dreadfully to hear a word said against you, or your family. I should shrink from it as much as yourself. Cannot we avoid it all? Cannot we think of some plan by which we shall be happy together and yet escape the storm, which is bound to come upon us as soon as our intentions are made public?"

"I do not understand you, Rachel," said the young man.

"It is impossible that we can transform ourselves, or marry without the world becoming cognizant of the fact."

"I am rich, you know," went on the girl, hurriedly—"rich enough to place you above all necessity of work, and I am as free as the air. I could leave all my money to you to-morrow, if—if—we were married. And I would, dearest—thankfully—gladly—only save me from the scandal and the vituperation! I do so dread a scene."

"Save you! Of course I would," said Geoffrey. "From the moment I had the right to do so, I would stand between you and everyone. You do not distrust me, Rachel?"

"No! No! But I don't think you quite understand me. Couldn't we leave England and make our home elsewhere? No one knows anything at present, but that you are a great artist, and it would be quite unnecessary to tell them any more. But if we lived at Catherstone, they would begin to inquire—they would ferret out everything. You understand me, don't you? It would never be forgotten against us."

"The fact of my birth, you mean. Of my father keeping a shop."

"Yes. Don't be angry with me, Geoffrey," for the young man had withdrawn himself a little from her side. "You know I should care for nothing in comparison with you. I have said that I love you. But the world is very bitter, and its shafts would hit us equally. If only we could prevent their finding it out."

"I am not angry with you, Rachel," he replied, gently. "On the contrary, you have said *that* to me to-night, for which I can never cease to be grateful to you. But we must understand each other plainly on one point. The woman who loves me, must meet me on my own ground. I will consent to no shirking of her duty, whatever. My people must be her people, as my God is her God. If they are not good enough for her, neither am I. Do you quite understand what you have asked me? To leave my family, and my country, and my profession. To turn my back on all three, and live a pensioner upon your gen-

erosity. No, Rachel ! not even for your love and yourself can I do this. You must either take me as I am, or not at all."

Her proud heart sank within her at his words. She knew now how passionately she loved him, and, somehow, she had fancied that the prejudice against his birth might be bridged over. Keeping his family in the background, changing their residence, even changing his name. Had not such tricks been resorted to before, when barriers stood in the way of love? But Geoffrey seemed resolute, and yet she felt he loved her.

"If—if—" she faltered, "it were not for that—that—place in Broadgate Street."

"How do you know it is in Broadgate Street?" he asked, quickly.

Geoffrey was too sharp for her. She had nearly betrayed her secret.

"I saw it in the Directory," she stammered.

"Ah! I might have guessed you would not have soiled your dainty feet by going there," he said, sarcastically. All the ice seemed to be growing up between them again. "And yet," continued Geoffrey, "my wife will have to go there, or she will never be my wife."

Rachel was silent, she did not know what to say. She felt sick and faint with the thought of the inevitable she saw looming before her.

"Listen to me," went on her companion. "Let me speak to you as man to woman. You love me, or you imagine you do. And you would condescend to marry me, on certain conditions. Suppose I were knave enough to accede to them. Ingrate enough to forget all the love of my father and mother. Cur enough to deny and forsake my own flesh and blood. What then? Would it unmake you Rachel Salter? Would you be the less my parents' daughter? Your children less the grand-children of a shop-keeper? Should I be worthy to be their father and your husband, if I consented? No, Rachel. I love you dearer than anything in this world, except my honor. But if you are to be my wife you must come to me. I will not go to you. And I must follow my profession, and build

up my own fortune. I cannot live upon the substance of any woman. So there you have my answer, and it rests with you to turn my life into heaven or hell."

But still she remained silent, under an awful dread of the world and its censure. She dared not make up her mind. She would have relinquished everything to possess this man, except the *one* thing which was so strongly ingrained in her nature, she could not cast it out—her pride of birth.

"Don't be so hard, Geoffrey," she said, with trembling lips. "Think of some plan, for God's sake. Let us try and meet each other half-way."

"No," he replied, with set teeth. "I do not ask you to come to me, Rachel. I tell you plainly that, to my mind, the barriers between us are insurmountable. But if you come, it must be *all* the way—straight to the heart, which never has turned and never will turn against those to whom it owes its deepest debt of gratitude."

"But it doesn't lie entirely with me," she demurred. "My family would raise such a commotion if they learned the truth, that they would force me to give you up. That is why I advised a little policy. You don't know what it is to have a large circle of relations, all objecting and sneering, and cavilling at what you do."

"No! I don't," he answered, shortly, and Rachel detected a fresh lassitude in his tone.

"Oh! don't let us talk about it any more to-night," she exclaimed. "You are over-tired, dearest. I can hear it in your voice. And the dew is falling. Let us go in. You might take cold."

He rose without answering her, and she caught him by the hand.

"Geoffrey!" she whispered; "say good-night to me here."

"Good-night, Rachel!"

"Ah! that is not what I meant," she answered, sadly.

"I know it is not what you meant, and it is a very hard task for me to pretend to misunderstand so sweet an invitation. But do you think I have any right to kiss you under present circumstances?"

"Kiss me first, and talk about the circumstances afterwards," she said.

Then he bent his head and kissed her very tenderly upon the lips.

"God bless you!" he murmured; "and good-bye!"

"Oh! why good-bye?"

"I must go back to my hotel now. I am very tired. I have not been up so late as this since I was taken ill. I know you will excuse me, and make my farewells to Miss Montrie. Once more, God bless you!"

And Geoffrey Salter walked rapidly (for an invalid) down the garden path, and was gone.

Rachel sat for some minutes where he had left her, feeling rather sobered by the seriousness of his manner and address, and sorry that she had not waited to know him a little better before she introduced the subject of his family, yet half believing he would return, if only to try and make her alter her mind about it. But Geoffrey did not return. He walked straight home, and after sitting by herself for a quarter of an hour, Miss Saltoun got off the low wall and sauntered back to the house, a little fearful, and a little disappointed, but hopeful of setting everything right on the morrow. After all, the great fact remained that she and Geoffrey loved each other, and had mutually confessed their love. *Après ça le deluge.*

She entered the villa, humming gayly to herself,—and wakened Miss Montrie by tickling her nose with the branch of roses.

"Oh, my dear! how you frightened me, and I was just dreaming all about banditti," exclaimed the old lady, as she sat up and straightened her cap. "But where is the young gentleman gone?"

"The young gentleman, as you call him (though I think it's a fitter name for a boy from Eton, than a Royal Academy Associate) has departed in peace, and I think it is about time we did the same. Do you know it is eleven o'clock? But as you've been snoring ever since dinner, I suppose you feel quite lively."

"Oh, my dear Rachel! I plead guilty to an occasional

little nap, but I do *not* snore," exclaimed Miss Montrie, with as much indignation as she could assume.

"So *you* say, old lady. However, you are forgiven, so come to bed."

Rachel's spirits continued till the next day. She rose from a couch, on which she had been too excited to sleep, full of buoyant hope and expectation. She was so sure that Geoffrey would either accede to her wishes, or find some other way out of the dilemma. The idea that he would voluntarily give her up, for the sake of his family, never once crossed her mind. He loved her too dearly, and his was a heart that would not easily forget. And if he really proved obdurate—why *she* would yield. If there were no other way, she *must* yield, for she could do anything rather than relinquish the sweet hope that irradiated her life—that made her feel, for the first time since she was born, that life was not a miserable term of penance, but a beautiful gift from the Creator, which He meant to be both happy and profitable for His creatures.

"You never told me, dear," observed Miss Montrie at the breakfast-table—"not, of course, that I have any right to inquire—still, I should like to hear what you said to soften the blow of your decision to poor Lord Vivian. I hope you broke it very gently to him?"

"Indeed, I didn't, then," replied Rachel; "neither had he any right to expect me to be gentle. Do you know, Miss Montrie, that he had the assurance to write and tell Captain Trentham that he was engaged to be married to me? Why, it was a direct falsehood. *That* would have been sufficient to make me decide against him, if nothing else was."

"But are you certain it is true? Who is Captain Trentham?"

"A fellow traveller and friend of Mr. Salter."

"And had that young man the audacity to repeat the story to you? Oh, Rachel, my dear, be careful how you condescend to discuss your private affairs with strangers. Those sort of people are sometimes very encroaching."

"What do you mean by 'those sort of people?'" demanded the young lady, rather sharply.

"Why, artists, my dear, and professionals and such like. It is true that Mr. Salter seems a very pleasant quiet young man. But one never knows where they come from; and I suppose he is not exactly what the Duke, your grandfather, would call a gentleman."

Miss Saltoun fired up immediately.

"Mr. Salter is a gentleman! the greatest gentleman I have ever known, whatever my noble grandfather might choose to call him. He would not stoop to do the things that his Grace does. I am sure of that. I hope, Montrie, dear, you are not going to fall into the vulgar error of judging people by their surroundings. If Mr. Salter had chanced to be born the heir to a coronet, I am sure he would have made a much better Duke than my wicked old grand-dad."

To Miss Montrie, who positively worshipped the whole Saltoun family, this speech sounded nothing short of rank blasphemy.

"My dear Rachel, I cannot bear to hear you speak in such a manner. You should have more respect for your noble grandfather."

"Respect! You don't know him as I do, or you'd cross the road if you saw him coming. Fancy, speaking of Geoffrey Salter and the Duke of Craig-Morris in the same breath! It is a very poor compliment to the painter of 'The Awakening of the Soul.'"

"Oh, I acknowledge he is a splendid artist; and so young, too. He must be very clever. It is a pity he is not better looking."

But this was altogether too much for Rachel's patience, and she rose abruptly and left the breakfast-table.

She had a design in her head, which she thirsted to carry out. She would write to Geoffrey and tell him how she regretted their little difference of opinion, and ask him to come to luncheon and talk the matter over again. He would understand from that (Rachel thought) that she intended to yield the point to him, and let him have it all his own way.

Her hand shook as she took up the pen. It is always a nervous thing for a woman to write the first time to the

man she loves. It is so like speaking to him, and yet she can write so much more than she could say. But yet, again, the written words remain as witnesses against her, and she is fearful of appearing too indifferent or too bold.

Rachel Saltoun had been used to be as reticent in her correspondence as in her conversation. She had never had any bosom friends, nor any lovers that she cared to write to. But now, as she viewed the pen and ink and paper before her, she glowed all over, as if Geoffrey Salter had been standing by her side.

How should she commence? What would he wish her to say? She could not call him "Mr. Salter"—not *now*—it would be absurd; but her hand shook as she traced his Christian name.

What a sweet name it was! Doesn't every woman think the name of the man she loves the very sweetest in the world?

Rachel was not the sort of woman to make a dozen copies of one letter, but she wrote slowly and deliberately in a large and decided hand; and when the note was finished, it ran thus:—

"MY DEAREST GEOFFREY,— Do come to lunch. I want to talk to you again upon our subject of discussion last night. It will be all right, believe me. We must not let such a trifle interfere with our happiness. I have hardly slept all night for thinking of it.—Yours affectionately.

"RAY."

She read it over several times before she decided it could not be improved upon, and then she enclosed it in an envelope, and sealed it with her dead father's large and somewhat ostentatious coat-of-arms, and despatched it by hand to its destination.

Whether it was the sight of that coat-of-arms, with its various quarterings, that neutralized the effect of her conciliatory little letter, it is hard to say, but Geoffrey Salter's answer was very different in the wording and tenor.

"MY DEAR MISS SALTOUN,—I return you my thanks

for your invitation, but I cannot accept it, as I leave Nice to-day. You will guess the reason why. The 'trifle' is not one that will bear discussion. No arguments can undo it, and I am too physically weak at present to be able to bear much excitement. I am sure that, on deliberation, you will acknowledge I am acting for the best.—Believe me, yours truly,

“GEOFFREY SALTER.”

CHAPTER XXX.

LORD VIVIAN'S NEWS.

It was just as well for Rachel Saltoun that she was alone when she received this letter, for she behaved like a frantic creature. Her pride, her *amour propre*, her love for Geoffrey Salter, every feeling that was strongest in her nature, was outraged by it; and her anger and disappointment knew no bounds.

It was over, then, she said to herself; the man had rejected her overtures of peace. She had humbled herself for nothing. It served her right for ever having dreamt of flying in the face of the world, and trampling on all her prejudices, for the sake of a person who did not know how to appreciate the sacrifice.

This was, of course, in her first transport of rage, when mortification and humbled pride reigned supreme, and she tried to persuade herself that she did not really care for her lover, and was very glad she had found it out before it was too late. She had been in a dream, that was all; and now the dream was over, and no one was the worse. But when the outburst was ended, Rachel locked her misery up in her own breast, and went down to luncheon very pale and tired in appearance, but calm, as though no such man as Geoffrey Salter existed.

"Aren't you getting just a little tired of Nice, Miss Montrie?" she said to her companion. "Wouldn't you like to move on somewhere?"

"My dear, that is for you to say. But I thought you admired the place so much."

"So I do. But it's just a wee bit monotonous. My cousin, Lady Hartley, is in Paris. I fancy I should enjoy myself better there. Tell Mears we shall go to Paris to-morrow."

"And that gentleman, Mr. Salter. Shall you not inform him of your sudden determination?"

"What has Mr. Salter to do with our movements?" exclaimed the girl, brusquely. "Madame Gramont should have a P. P. C. card. Will you send round one this evening?"

"But, dear Miss Saltoun, surely you will call on Madame Gramont to say good-bye in person?"

"No; 'dear Miss Saltoun' will do nothing of the kind. I have a headache from the sun, and want to rest. Now, dear old lady, don't stand staring at me with your mouth open. You are surely used enough to my erratic disposition by this time. Can't you understand that I feel dull. I want to go to some theatres and see a little life. Marion and I always get on well together, and I will send her a wire at once, to secure us rooms in the hotel where she is staying."

And Rachel went singing, at the top of her voice, all the way upstairs to her bedroom, with complete oblivion of the headache she had confessed to.

As soon as ever they were settled down in Paris, she commenced to run about from theatres and opera-houses, to concerts and *salons*, in the company of her cousin, Lady Hartley, till she scarcely ever spent an evening at home. More feverishly excited than she had been at Scarborough, she wasted her strength in such a prodigal fashion, that she lost flesh in a manner to alarm Miss Montrie; and, besides being as thin as a lath, she became as white as a ghost. Any remonstrance, however, only provoked her ire, and so her companion allowed her to go her own way, knowing, from experience, that she could not stand the incessant strain on her physical powers for very long. And so it happened that, after the festivities of the *Jour de l'an*, Rachel suddenly broke down, and could do no more. And then all her cry was to go back to Catherstone. She could not imagine, now she came to think of it, how she could ever have remained away from home so long—from her horses and dogs, her flower-garden, and her poor people. She had been selfish—wicked—sinfully negligent—to leave them to look after themselves for such a length of time.

So Rachel reproached herself, stopping every now and then to ask Miss Montrie if she minded returning to England.

She was lying on a sofa in her bedroom as she put the question, and her companion was sitting beside her, holding her hot hand. Rachel looked ethereal in her white cashmere dressing-gown, trimmed with swansdown—with her chestnut hair streaming over her shoulders, and her earnest gray eyes lighting up her white, thin face.

"*Mind it, my darling!*" said Miss Montrie (these two had grown wonderfully affectionate and intimate during Rachel's illness); "do you suppose I could mind anything that was for your good? I am so glad you have thought of dear old Catherstone at last. I really began to fear we were never going back there again. But I am sure home will be the best place for you, for you are far from well, Rachel. This dissipated life does not agree with you."

"Home!" repeated the girl. "Yes! let us go home. What a sweet, sweet sound it is. If there were only someone to welcome me there, Miss Montrie—someone besides the horses and dogs and servants. Such a big place as Catherstone is very lonely for only you and me."

"Ah! well—well! it will all come in good time," replied the old lady, as she patted her young friend's hand; "Catherstone will be full enough some day, please God, with the sound of little voices and little feet."

"Never! never!" said Rachel, shaking her head. "Don't talk of it, Montrie, dear, unless you want to make me worse. Can't you guess, you silly old thing, the secret of all my fits of merriment and misery? Ah! I never thought I should have let it out to anybody; but you have been more like a mother to me than anyone else, since my poor mother died. Dear old friend, there will never be anyone at Catherstone, but just we two. I have missed my chance, dear. I have passed it by; and I am not the sort of girl to love twice in a lifetime. Oh, don't cry. I am not crying myself, you see. I have learned to speak of it quite calmly. Only you must not think I shall ever marry. Don't joke with me about it, nor try to persuade me to alter my mind. Teach me how to live happily and

usefully instead, as you have done, and I shall be quite content."

But the old woman had quite broken down.

"Oh, my darling child," she sobbed, in little, short gasps, "I never dreamed of this. I thought you were too cold and distant to think of such a thing; and it has made you so ill, too. It is terrible."

"It was not that that made me ill," cried Rachel. "I made myself ill by rushing about in this stupid manner, with the idea of forgetting all about it. But one can't forget—not in that sort of way, Montrie, dear, were you ever in love?"

"I was engaged to be married, my dear, to a young clergyman, but he died. But that is a long, long time ago—five-and-twenty years—and I have nearly forgotten it by now."

"And so shall I forget," said Rachel, with a big sigh; "at least, I hope so. Mine is dead, too—lost to me altogether—and so I am *determined* to forget. And, after to-day, we will not speak of it, only I am glad that you should know. It will make you understand better why I am sometimes so impatient and selfish and hard to get on with. I would rather you thought my heart was aching, than that I had no heart at all."

"You are never impatient nor selfish with me, Rachel," replied her companion. "You are so changed from what you once were, that sometimes I wonder if you are the same girl. But I see it all now. You have suffered, poor darling, and that has subdued your high spirit. And I would rather see you your old self, if it could lift the burden off your young shoulders."

"No, don't say that. I have heard—a friend told me once—that no trouble was sent without a purpose, and that it lay with ourselves whether we turned it into a blessing or a bane. I have been thinking a good deal, since I have been lying here, of what my friend said, and I should like to try and turn my trouble into a blessing for others. My wealth is a great responsibility, and I never seemed to have realized it. It has been so natural to me to be rich; I can never remember being otherwise, and so I have

selfishly forgotten how many are so poor, that a very small portion of my daily expenditure would be quite a godsend to them. You must help me to correct all this, Montrie, dear. We will find out the poor of Roehampton, and try to make them happy. I wish I had returned before Christmas. I might have brightened up so many homes at that time. And I suppose my fat turkeys and geese are waddling about the farmyard and eating their heads off. Oh! I have been very selfish, and I suppose this—this trouble is my punishment.”

“Is there no cure for the trouble, Rachel?” asked Miss Montrie, softly.

“Not that I can see.”

“We none of us can see what is ahead in life, my dear, and the surest way to bring things right is to do right. If you carry out what you propose, you are certain to gain peace, if not happiness. There must be any amount of such work to be done round Catherstone.”

“Dear, dear Catherstone!” exclaimed the girl, feverishly. “Oh! how I wish we were there! I shall never get any better in this horrid hotel!”

“Patience, dear. We shall start as soon as ever the doctor allows you to travel. I wrote to the housekeeper yesterday to keep fires burning in all the rooms, as she might receive a telegram to say we had started at any moment. And if you will only lie still and not excite yourself, I dare say we shall be off in a day or two.”

Rachel lay back on her pillow submissively.

“I cannot help thinking,” she said, “of, ‘The Awakening of the Soul.’ It haunts me. I think I am just like that girl. My eyes seem opening to the wonderful, mysteries of life, and the purpose for which we were born. It is like a new birth. So much misery in the world and so much beauty, and such utter carelessness on the part of those who will neither see nor hear. So much thought for worldly positions, and titles, and appointments, and none for the marvels of Nature that are opening on every side of us, and telling us of God. I suppose it is because they are so common,” continued Rachel, languidly, “that we pass them by and never think of the great comfort they

might be to us, when we have lost everything else."

Miss Montrie listened to this exordium in silent amazement. As she had told Rachel, she could hardly believe she was the same girl, whose pride was the greatest drawback to her character. Without it, Rachel Saltoun was as meek and lovable as a little child. But the old lady hardly believe the mood could last. She attributed it solely to her languor, and her disappointment. It was hardly possible that such a transformation should be permanent.

Once more *queen regnant* at Catherstone, she expected to see the heiress under her old colors. But Rachel did not seem to rally. She was very quiet and subdued during the journey home, and displayed none of her usual exultation at entering once more on her own possessions. On the contrary, Miss Montrie detected her in something very much like tears over the old mare Jenny, during her first visit to the stables. And she stood wrapt in contemplation, before 'The Awakening of the Soul,' for nearly an hour on the morning after her arrival.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she said to Miss Montrie, who had crept up behind her. "Look at the delicacy of those flesh tints, and the modesty of the attitude. Though the figure is nude, you never seem to remember it. Your soul seems to go out to her soul, and forget everything else. It is a sermon in itself. What a heart and soul he must have, to have painted such a picture."

"He is, indeed, a wonderfully-gifted young man," acquiesced Miss Montrie, "But, Ray, dear, you mustn't be angry, but James has just announced that Lord Vivian is in the library. Now, will you see him, or shall I tell him you are not well enough?"

Ray's face immediately assumed its haughtiest expression.

"No; I will see him. I wish to do so. I should like to tell him, face to face, what I think of his conduct."

"It will not be too much for you?" said Miss Montrie, anxiously.

"Not at all; and should it prove so, I will call you to my assistance. But why should it be? I am not afraid of him, nor, thank God, of myself. I see the weakness of

which I was guilty in not giving him a decided answer, and if he wants me to beg his pardon for it, I am quite willing to do so. But that is all Lord Vivian will get from me. Let me go at once, Montrie, dear. If I keep him waiting, he will think I am mustering up my courage. I shall not be more than ten minutes about it."

She flew down to the library as she spoke, and entered it with a heightened color that might have raised hope in a less sanguine breast than that of Lord Vivian. But she went forward and held out her hand to him as calmly as if he had been the most ordinary acquaintance.

"Good-morning, Lord Vivian," she commenced. "May I ask to what I owe the honor of so unusually early a visit?"

"Ah, Miss Saltoun, pray do not speak to me like that. I happened to hear from your grandfather yesterday that you were returning from Paris, and seized the first opportunity of seeing you."

"So I perceive. But you mustn't think me rude if I tell you that I am very busy, having only returned home last night, and that I am really not prepared to receive visitors."

"Grant me a few minutes in which to ask you if I cannot make you recall the cruel decision conveyed in your letter from Nice. It was so unexpected—so contrary to the hope you graciously extended to me at Scarborough."

"I think the hope must have existed in your own imagination, Lord Vivian. I promised you to consider your proposal, and I kept my word. Have you kept yours?"

"In what, pray! I do not understand the question."

"When you begged me to take a month or two to think over what you had said to me, you annexed a promise that all things should go on exactly in the same way between us, and that no difference should be made until I had made my up mind upon the subject."

"Well, and has it not been so?" demanded his lordship.

"Hardly, when you had the assurance to write and tell Captain Trentham that you were engaged to be married to me," was the indignant reply.

"Trentham! Where have you met with Trentham?" exclaimed Lord Vivian.

"That is nothing to the purpose. I have never met him; but he respected your confidence so little (that is, if it were in confidence that you informed him of what was not true), that he repeated it to a third person, who taxed me with the truth."

"Trentham is a fool!" cried Lord Vivian in a tone of vexation. "Look here, Miss Saltoun, don't be angry with me, but I *did* tell him——"

"Of course you told him! No one else did."

"But it was half a joke."

"I am obliged to you for thinking it a joke. It is one that is ended, as far as I am concerned."

"Are you really going to be so very cruel to me, Rachel? You seemed to like me at Scarborough. What has changed you so completely?"

"I *do* like you, Lord Vivian, but I cannot marry you, and you must remember that I told you all along that there was no chance of my changing my mind; and I have regretted a thousand times since that I was so weak as to consent even to think about it. It has only prolonged the unpleasantness. But even had I been well inclined towards you, the knowledge that you had broken your word would have decided me to refuse your proposal. It was taking a liberty with my name that I shall never forgive."

"I would like to wring the neck of the interfering fool that repeated it to you," said Lord Vivian, wrathfully; "and unless it was that fellow, Salter, who was travelling with Trentham, I don't know who it can have been. However, he's got his *quietus*, poor devil, in Algiers, and won't make any more mischief for anyone."

"What—did—you—say?" asked Rachel, very slowly.

"Salter, the artist, died of fever in Algiers last week. Haven't you heard of it? It was in most of the papers. An awful pity! for he promised to be a wonderful painter. However, I sha'n't cry over him, if he's at the bottom of this rupture between you and me. But what is the matter?" continued Lord Vivian, as he turned to where

Rachel was holding on to the back of a chair, and swaying slowly from side to side. "Miss Saltoun—Rachel! Speak to me! Are you ill?"

But all the answer he received was conveyed by a dull, heavy sound, as Rachel fell senseless on the floor.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MISS MONTRIE'S NEWS.

AGAIN was the breakfast-table of his Grace the Duke of Craig-Morris fated to be broken in upon. He had hardly seated himself at it on the morning after Rachel's interview with Lord Vivian, before his man Eaton appeared, looking extremely grave, and announced that Miss Montrie was waiting below to speak to him.

"Miss Montrie," repeated the Duke, wrinkling his shaggy eyebrows; "d'ye mean the old woman that lives with Miss Saltoun? Can't see her. Say I'm engaged, and can see no one."

"But, begging your Grace's pardon, I think she comes with news of the Honorable Miss Saltoun. I fancy, your Grace—I am almost afraid there is something amiss with Miss Saltoun."

"Amiss! amiss! What is it? Illness—infection? Find out if it's anything infectious, Eaton, and if it is, fumigate the woman before you let her come upstairs."

"Very good, your Grace."

"I'm not well, you know, Eaton. In fact I'm feeling very ill this morning, and am liable to take anything. Miss Saltoun has been travelling abroad, and may have brought home malaria, or typhoid, or small-pox. Be very particular to find out what it is, Eaton, and let me hear before Miss Montrie enters the room."

"Certainly, your Grace," replied the man, as he quitted the apartment.

The Duke was certainly looking ill. He had attended a large dinner a few days before, and eaten far more than was good for him. Consequently he had set up a bilious attack, and the necessary remedies had brought him rather low. He was too old to play with his constitution,

which was not a good one ; but he was too self-indulgent to take care of it. And each illness he brought upon himself made him more sour, and querulous and hard, for he recognized the fact that he was failing, and he feared death as much as a man could do.

In a few minutes Eaton re-appeared.

"It is nothing infectious, your Grace, but it is very serious. Miss Montrie says it is imperative she should see your Grace at once."

"Oh, very well," replied the Duke, peevishly ; "show her up, then ; but caution her not to stay long. I want my breakfast, and it is a most unreasonable time for any one to pay a morning call."

The servant bowed acquiescence, and presently ushered Miss Montrie into his master's presence. The first sight of the little woman startled the Duke. Her face was so swollen with crying, that her eyes were hardly visible, and she trembled so violently with agitation, that she sunk into the first chair she found, without stopping to make the profound reverence with which she usually greeted her august friend.

"Why ! bless my soul !" exclaimed the Duke, "what's the matter with you ? You look as if you had been up all night."

"And so I have, your Grace. I have been in such a state of fear and agitation that rest was impossible to me. Miss Saltoun has left Catherstone."

"Bolted ? Who with ? The footman ?"

"Oh, your Grace ! I entreat you not to make a jest of the matter. It is very grave and important. Miss Saltoun has been much harassed of late, and, I fear, she may have lost her reason. I am in an agony of apprehension to learn where she can be."

"When did she leave home ?"

"I cannot tell your Grace," replied Miss Montrie, weeping ; "perhaps I had better relate the story from the beginning. Miss Saltoun fainted dead away yesterday morning. Lord Vivian was calling on her at the time. She had a slight illness in Paris, and was not strong when we crossed ; but I have been with her six years, and never

saw her faint away like that before. It was half-an-hour before we could bring her to."

"Well, well!" said the old man, testily. "But what has it to do with her leaving Catherstone?"

"Oh, your Grace! I am coming to that. When she had recovered consciousness, I persuaded her to lie down and rest, and left her in her bedroom for that purpose. An hour afterwards I crept up to see if she was sleeping, and she had gone. Not a trace of her anywhere, but her travelling costume and furs missing. Yet no one saw her leave the house."

"And she hasn't come back?"

"No, your Grace. No, or I shouldn't be here. We searched the grounds and village for her without effect. I have been nearly distracted all night. What can have become of the dear girl? She is not used to go about alone. And on foot too. Oh, it is terrible! I expected to see her dead body brought home every instant. And I thought, this morning, the best thing I could do was to come and ask counsel of your Grace."

"But what can I do? I cannot go running all over the town, looking for my grand-daughter. I am ill, madam, ill. And if I were not, Rachel is quite old enough to look after herself. D'ye suppose she's gone *alone*? I don't. Most likely the faint was a put-up affair, to throw you off the scent. You're not a genius, you know, madam. It wouldn't take much to deceive *you*! And I always said the baggage would go to the d—l. And now I suppose she has. Well, she never listened to my advice, and I wash my hands of her."

"Your Grace cannot mean what you say," replied Miss Montrie, with open eyes, "or remember that you speak of your grand-daughter. I am *sure* Miss Saltoun went away by herself. But why did she go, and where is she? Perhaps wandering about somewhere, raving and delirious, or lying drowned at the bottom of one of her own ponds."

"Have the ponds dragged, then, and you'll find out," sneered the Duke.

"Has your Grace no feeling—no affection?" cried the old lady, indignantly. "I came to you to help me to

elucidate a terrible mystery, and you speak of it as indifferently as if she were a lost dog or cat. I know you and Rachel did not get on well together, but I little thought you could speak of your own son's child like that. Why, the lowest servant in her establishment is feeling it more keenly."

"But I am not a servant, madam, and I'm not a fool, and neither is my grand-daughter, Rachel Saltoun. On the contrary, she is a particularly independent, high-spirited and courageous young woman, as she gave evidence in this room the day before she left England. She is not at all the sort of person to go mad for love. She is far more likely to disgrace her family by eloping with some low person and brazening the matter out to our faces. You say you came here for my advice. Well, my advice is, that you go back to Catherstone and say as little about this matter as need be. My lady will find her way home again fast enough, when she is tired of playing at her little game."

And the Duke smiled in an unpleasant, sneering manner, that showed his long yellow teeth, and dry, cracked lips.

Miss Montrie was indignant, and indignation lent her courage.

"You are a bad, cruel man," she gasped. "I have often defended you to Rachel, and tried to uphold the dignity of your name and position. But I will do so no more, for I think you disgrace them both. Rachel is right. There can never be any sympathy between her and you."

The Duke made no answer to this tirade, except by touching the electric bell that stood at his elbow.

"Show this woman out," he said, curtly, as Eaton appeared, and Miss Montrie trotted past him with all the dignity her pousy little person could assume, and left the room without another word. Her face was no longer sodden now. It had become fiery red with excitement, and Eaton saw that the interview had not been a pleasant one.

"His Grace is not quite the thing to-day, miss, and perhaps a bit irritable. His bile has got the upper hand of him, and he won't be well till it's dispersed."

"Then the sooner it's dispersed the better," replied Miss Montrie, stiffly.

"Shall I call you a cab, miss?"

"Yes; a four-wheeler, if you please, Eaton, and tell the driver to take me to Sir Henry Mordaunt's, in Ladgrove Square."

Here the unhappy little woman found a far more sympathetic listener, and both Sir Henry and Lady Mordaunt were visibly distressed by the news she brought them.

"Poor, darling Ray," said the Baronet, when Miss Montrie had related what she had told the Duke. "But now, Miss Montrie, please to be quite open with us. Have you any private clue to this mystery? Why should you fear that Ray has gone off her head? Do you know of any secret trouble that has oppressed her?"

Miss Montrie looked confused.

"Oh, Sir Henry! how am I to tell you? Miss Saltoun *did* repose a confidence in me whilst ill in Paris, which made me think that she suffered a good deal of mental misery; but it *was* a confidence, and I cannot betray it, even to you."

"Never mind; the fact is sufficient. Did Ray seem all right when she rose yesterday morning?"

"With the exception of being tired after her journey, yes. But she has been depressed in spirits for some time past; she is quite different from what she used to be. I found her in the stable yesterday, crying over one of the horses; and she stood before that picture of 'The Awakening of the Soul' for a long time afterwards, and said she was just like the girl in it, which I thought strange."

"The picture that was painted by Mr. Salter, you mean?"

"Yes, Sir Henry."

"And how soon after that did Lord Vivian arrive?"

"He came at the very time. She was standing before the picture when I went to announce his arrival to her, and she made that remark. I asked her if I should see Lord Vivian, and say she was too tired to receive him; but she said no, that she wished to speak to his lordship herself."

"Is Ray on friendly terms with Lord Vivian, Miss Montrie?"

"She is not unfriendly with him, Sir Henry, but she has given up all idea of marrying him."

"Ah! When did she do that?"

"When we were at Nice, the day before we left for Paris. So she told me."

"And did you question Lord Vivian as to the reason of this fainting fit? They were alone together, were they not, when it occurred?"

"Yes. The first I heard of it was by his lordship running out into the corridor and calling the servant. I was on the staircase at the time. He said, 'Go at once and fetch the companion or the lady's maid, Miss Saltoun has fainted.' I ran down, of course, and there she was on the floor—insensible."

"What was he talking of at the time? Did you ask him that?"

"I did, Sir Henry, and he said he was just telling her of poor Mr. Salter's death in Algiers. Ah!" cried Miss Montrie, suddenly and uncontrollably, as recollection poured in upon her.

"Why do you start in that manner? What are you thinking of?" said Lady Mordaunt. "Pray keep nothing from us out of a false sense of honor, Miss Montrie. Anything that can give a clue to dear Rachel's state of mind will be valuable, and you may be sure that her secrets will be as safe with her uncle and myself as with you."

"I am certain of that, my lady, but——"

"Now, is poor Mr. Salter and his untimely death at the bottom of the mystery? Was she in love with him? He was a long time at Catherstone, you know. Did she tell you anything about him?"

"Nothing, my lady. She never mentioned his name to me as connected in any way with herself. But when I come to put this and that together, I remember he was with us at Nice the very day dear Rachel refused Lord Vivian's hand, and she was vexed with me for saying that Mr. Salter had no right to have repeated to her the con-

tents of his lordship's letter to Captain Trentham. And then at Paris, when she was ill, she told me, dear girl, that she had a heart trouble, and should never be happy again in this world. And when I connect that with the remarks she made about Mr. Geoffrey Salter's pictures, and her fainting when she heard of his death, well, I don't know what to think."

"I do, plain enough," said the Baronet. "Rachel is a high-strung and romantic girl, with a lot of artistic feeling, and has probably woven a romance about this young fellow that has taken a fatal effect upon her imagination. It is very unfortunate; but he is dead, so it can come to nothing. But all this affords us no solution of the question of where she has gone. It is most mysterious. Who *was* this Geoffrey Salter? Where did he come from? Did she know his people? Can she have gone to them?"

"I can tell you nothing, Sir Henry. I never saw the gentleman but that one day at Nice, and then he seemed very ordinary looking to me. A pale, silent young man, who ate nothing. I don't wonder he's dead. But dear Rachel never mentioned a word about his family or residence to me."

"I know Mr. Salter had a studio at Haverstock Hill, for I have been there," said Sir Henry; "but I am almost sure he lived alone. He was intimate with young Carus, however, and perhaps he could tell us about his family. It's a delicate matter to deal with, Miss Montrie. I shouldn't like to put it into the hands of the police, except as a last resource. We must try every available means first. These misadventures get bruited about only too soon."

"But can I do nothing?" exclaimed Miss Montrie, wringing her hands.

"Yes! you can go back to Catherstone and wait her return. I know it will be a time of terrible suspense and anxiety for you, but what else can you do? Ray is more likely to return home, or to write to you there than you are to find her, roaming about London. In fact, my dear lady, it's a case in which, as far as I can see, there is nothing to be done by a woman's hand. If I can get no

information from Mr. Carus, I will set a private detective on her track. But I cannot imagine Rachel going off her head. She's not the sort of woman to do it. She is rather scatter-brained, and may have set off on some wild-goose chase; but in that case, you will see her back at Catherstone before long. Come, you must cheer up. I cannot look at the matter in so dismal a light as you do."

"Oh! Sir Henry; I see no hope anywhere," said Miss Montrie, weeping. "My poor, sweet girl. And the Duke actually advised me to have the ponds dragged."

"Oh! you mustn't mind what the Duke says," interposed Lady Mordaunt, soothingly. "Everybody knows him for the hardest and most selfish old man in London. And sometimes I have almost thought he hated poor Ray, because she has so much more money than himself. I shouldn't be surprised at anything he said."

"Well, I had better go and see Carus at once," said her husband; "and then I'll take Miss Montrie home. She's not fit to travel by herself."

"Why should you think, Hal," asked Lady Mordaunt, "that Rachel would go to Mr. Salter's family? I have never heard her say that she even knew them."

"Neither have I," replied the Baronet; "but Ray is very reticent in some things, and if she has conceived a fancy for this man, she might have chosen to keep everything concerning him to herself. However, you know it is only conjecture from beginning to end. We are working entirely in the dark, but we cannot sit down with folded hands and do nothing. So I'll try and catch Carus before he goes out for the day."

But in another half hour the Baronet was back again, as bewildered as when he went.

"I have not gained an inch," he said. "I am as mystified as when I started. I found young Carus still in bed, and was obliged to make up a blundering excuse for wanting any information about the Salters. I said we had been exceedingly interested in the poor young man, and would like to send our condolences to his family. But Carus knows nothing about them—not even if they

live in London or the country. He says he has met Salter's father on one or two occasions at the studio at Havestock Hill, but never had the curiosity to ask his place of residence. Geoffrey Salter was not the sort of man, he says, to talk about himself or his belongings. He has read the report of his death, in common with all London, but, strange to say, he doesn't believe it. There has been a good deal of fever amongst the English visitors to Algiers this season, and Carus thinks the name may have been inserted by mistake. Reuter only mentioned the death of a Salter, and the London papers immediately concluded it must be the artist."

"But it is not a common name," said Lady Mor-daunt.

"No; but Carus has a strange reason for his incredulity. He says Geoffrey Salter was only just recovering from a severe malarial attack, and was not in the condition to take a second infection on the top of it. There's something in that, I think. But the Press seems to take his death for certain."

"He is too successful," said his wife. "They are always glad to get a dangerous rival out of the way."

"But what has all this to do with my dear lost Rachel?" cried Miss Montrie.

"Nothing, I allow," said Sir Henry; "but as we cannot trace the Salters, we are at a standstill. Come, Miss Montrie, you must leave this in my hands. Let me take you back to Catherstone, and you shall have news of her as soon as ever I do so myself."

CHAPTER XXXII.

GEOFFREY'S PEOPLE.

SIR HENRY MORDAUNT spoke cheerfully, but, in reality, he felt very despondent about his niece. A mystery is always hard to bear, and when it concerns the fate of a young and beautiful woman, it becomes appalling. The most natural thing to suppose was, that she had eloped with some unknown lover, and secretly married him. But her uncle rejected the idea with scorn. In the first place, Rachel was too proud and mindful of her own position to do anything so derogatory to herself; and in the second, there was not the least necessity for it. She was independent, and her own mistress. What motive could she have for a clandestine marriage? The fear that haunted Sir Henry was, that under great mental trouble, she might have wandered forth in so confused a condition of mind as to have fallen an easy prey to such ruffians as might design to rob or murder her, or kidnap her for their own purposes.

Meantime, whilst Miss Montrie wrung her hands, and Sir Henry and everybody who loved her was very anxious and unhappy, Rachel Saltoun had found a resting-place for herself. When she awoke to consciousness after her fainting fit and found she was lying on her bed, she felt as if someone had taken a hammer and hit her a severe blow on the head. Everything seemed confused and uncertain. She was not sure why she was in her own room, or what had made her ill, or whether she was very unhappy, or had no sense of feeling at all. She had but one desire—to be left alone, and in the dark. The light annoyed her; Miss Montrie's sympathy annoyed her; and Mears' attentions annoyed her most of all.

She kept on murmuring:

"Go away. Leave me alone. I wish to sleep."

And Miss Montrie had murmured back :

"Yes, dear, certainly. The best thing for you. Mears, draw down the blinds, make up the fire, and we will leave Miss Saltoun to sleep off the effects of her illness."

And then the two women had crept out of the room on tiptoe, and spoken in whispers till they reached the lower landing.

As soon as they were fairly gone Rachel sprang off the bed, and began, with feverish haste, to assume her walking things.

There was something like the light of a temporary insanity in her eye then. Her brain was still confused and whirling. She did not clearly know what she wanted, nor what she intended to do. Only she remembered that Geoffrey was dead—Lord Vivian had told her so—Geoffrey was gone, past recall, past her repentance, and sorrow, and remorse. She could never speak to him more, and she had a vague feeling that she must go to his people, the people whom he had loved—his father and his mother—and tell them that he had been all the world to her, and she to him, and she claimed her right to weep with them. It would comfort her, Rachel thought, as she fastened her cloak with shaking fingers ; she should feel less heavy, and confused and sodden, if she could cry in the arms of Geoffrey's mother.

But even as she descended the staircase with trembling limbs that threatened to give way beneath her, she listened with the cunning of a disordered mind to hear if anyone would intercept her departure ; and she did not leave Catherstone by the ordinary way, but crept round the shrubberies and out of a wicket gate, that opened on the common.

Yes, there was no doubt that on that particular occasion Rachel Saltoun was not responsible for her actions. The sudden shock had paralyzed her brain. It had frozen the machinery of that mysterious organ, and it had no power to reason, or to think.

On went Rachel, mechanically, to the railway station, but walking hurriedly and unremittingly until she reached it.

The booking-office clerk glanced curiously at her as she asked for her ticket, her voice sounded so strange and muffled ; but she had a thick veil on, and he did not recognize her face.

She travelled to town in a stupefied condition, and, in the same manner, got into a cab on her arrival at Waterloo, and directed the driver to the hosier's shop in Broadgate Street. The thought of the "shop" excited neither scorn nor horror in her mind now. Had it been Geoffrey's tomb she could not have approached it with greater reverence and awe, though she had no idea what she should do when she got there. The cabman drove her through the busy, crowded streets as in a dream, but she had the sense to stop him before he drew up at the door.

"I will get down here," said Rachel, as she tottered from the cab, and proffered him some money.

"*Quisbey*," thought the cabman to himself, as he saw his fare reel as she walked away, and counted the silver she had placed in his palm. "What a pity when they takes to it so young."

Even had she heard the remark, Rachel would not have cared. She cared for nothing now but to reach the home of Geoffrey's people. Suddenly she looked up. She was just opposite to it, and—good God!—the blinds were down. It was true, then. Geoffrey was gone, and they had darkened the hosier's shop in reverence for his dear memory. Rachel gave a cry, as if someone had struck her. She realized then that she had not quite believed in the report of her lover's death, that she had cherished a faint hope that it might prove untrue, and had sought his family as much with a view of ascertaining if they had received more reliable information than herself, as to mingle her tears with theirs. Rachel was exceedingly weak still. She had hardly recovered from her attack in Paris, and her fainting fit had sorely tried her feeble strength. When she caught sight of the drawn blinds she made sure all hope was over, and stumbled, blindly, across the road. A hansom nearly ran over her. A drayman swore at her in the choicest English, and some kindly passer-by dragged her on the pavement on the opposite

side, just as the horses of a private carriage touched her shoulder.

"That was a narrow shave," he said, good-humoredly. "You gave me a start. I thought you were under the horses' feet."

But Rachel only stared at him dully for reply, as she staggered forward into the hosier's shop. An assistant came to meet her.

"What can I do for you, madam?" he asked, as he motioned her to a chair.

But all the answer Rachel made was to stumble against the offered seat in a very clumsy fashion, and then go down with a crash on the floor for the second time that day.

The young men in the shop were all confounded. At first they thought the lady must be dead, but a female customer declared her to be in a faint.

"Run and get a glass of water and a fan," she exclaimed. "Here, raise her head, and give her more air. Have you any burnt feathers, or smelling salts, or aromatic vinegar, to put under her nose?"

But these innumerable directions were too much for the bewildered assistants, one of whom ran into Mr. Salter's private office with the news.

"If you please, sir, there's a lady taken ill in the shop—tumbled right down on the floor, sir."

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Mr. Salter, hurrying to the spot; "a lady taken ill! Who is she? Poor thing!"

"Don't know, sir; not one of our regular customers."

"Where is Mrs. Hindes or Miss Salter? We must get some woman to attend to her. Turn her face this way, Mr. Wilson. Why, bless my soul! it's Mrs. Wood. Here, Mr. Roberts, run through to the house at once, and tell Mrs. Salter I am bringing a friend of Mr. Geoffrey's to the breakfast-room to recover from a swoon; and you, Mr. Wilson and Mr. Matthews, help me to carry her through the hall. No sign of consciousness. Dear, dear! this is an unfortunate accident."

"Put burnt feathers under her nose, sir. It's an infallible remedy," cried the female customer, as Rachel was borne, like a corpse, away.

"Thank you, madam. My wife is an excellent nurse, and will know the right thing to do. Take care of the turning, Wilson."

So saying, they carried their insensible burden out of the shop, and through a handsome hall, into a well-furnished sitting-room. At the door they were met by a lady—a fragile, ethereal-looking little woman, with bands of silver-gray hair on either side of her face, and two dark blue eyes that reminded one powerfully of Geoffrey Salter's.

"Who is this, Will?" she said. "A friend of Geoffrey's?"

"Yes, dear; a Mrs. Wood. She called upon me once before. I can't tell you about her now. I don't know what she wanted with me, but she's evidently very ill. She fainted in the shop. Place her on the sofa, Wilson. That's right. Those cushions under her head, Matthews. And now, mother, we'll leave the rest to you."

"Oh, stay a moment, Will, till I see if she comes round easily. Where's Emmie? She will help me to loosen her things. How pretty she is. What lovely hair. Is she a widow, Will, or a married woman?"

"I know no more than you do, Mary. She called on me once about a situation for a friend of hers, and I was sorry not to be able to help her, because she mentioned that she knew our boy. Aren't you going to try smelling-salts, or burnt feathers, or something to bring her round?"

"Wait a little," said Mrs. Salter, gently; "I don't care to try violent remedies until ordinary ones have failed. - I think she will recover by herself, but if not, I will send for Dr. Barcham. I wonder what can have occasioned such complete unconsciousness?"

She was sitting by the side of the sofa as she spoke, quietly chafing Rachel's cold hands between her own. As she did so, she pointed them out to Mr. Salter.

"What beautiful hands," she remarked; "but no wedding-ring on them, Will. Are you sure she is a *Mrs.* Wood? Perhaps she said *Miss*. She looks young to be either married or a widow."

"Well, my dear, I can only repeat what she told me.

I don't know her from Adam, and Geoffrey has never mentioned her name. Hush! Isn't she stirring?"

"Yes; her head moved slightly," replied Mrs. Salter. "You had better go now, Will, and send Emmie to me with the *eau-de-Cologne* and a fan. Don't be surprised to find this young lady installed in the best bedroom to-night. If she is a friend of my boy's, she doesn't leave us till she is quite fit to do so."

"All right," said her husband, as he returned to his business.

Rachel was sufficiently recovered to hear the last words, but still too confused to feel any curiosity to learn who uttered them. She lay, dizzy and faint, upon the soft cushions, with her eyes closed, and her heart slowly beating back to its normal condition. Presently, as in a dream, she heard a door softly opened and a voice whisper:

"Father says you want me, mother, and someone is ill. Oh, poor dear," it continued, as footsteps approached the couch, "Who is she? How did it happen? What a sweet, pale face she has. What is her name?"

"Hush, Emmie! Not so many questions. She may rouse at any moment," replied her mother. "I know her no more than you do, but she is one of Geoffrey's friends."

"Is she?" exclaimed the girl, eagerly. "Oh, how glad I am, then, that she was taken ill here, so that we can nurse her. She is reviving, mother."

"Yes, dear, but not conscious yet. Keep out of sight, Emmie. It will be enough for her to find herself with one stranger at a time. There, there, my dear," she continued, as she stroked Rachel's hand, and dabbed her forehead with *eau-de-Cologne*, "you are getting better now, are you not?"

But Rachel did not take any heed of what was said to her. Her eyes were open, but her memory had not returned, nor, apparently, her hearing. She had struck her head, in falling, against the sharp corner of the counter, and had been partially stunned by the blow, which, in her weak condition, had an increased effect upon her. The sofa on which she lay—a large, old-fashioned, comfortable one, piled with cushions—was drawn in front of a big fire,

which blazed and crackled cheerily. She gazed at the burning logs for some moments, conscious only of the warmth and sound, and then raised her eyes languidly, to a large picture that hung above the mantelpiece. For a moment, she thought that Geoffrey Salter stood before her. It was a half-length portrait of the artist executed by himself, as a birthday present for his mother. It represented him standing before his easel, with palette and brushes in his hand, and his face was turned right round, as though he were contemplating the view which he was transferring to the canvas. The brown velvet coat, the carelessly knotted necktie, the earnest eyes, the frank, sweet, serious smile, all seemed so familiar to Rachel Saltoun, that it brought the hideous truth of *why* she was there, like a sudden floor upon her memory, and she shrunk back with a cry of "Geoffrey!"

"Did you say Geoffrey, my dear?" inquired Mrs. Salter. "Oh, yes; that is he. He painted it himself for my birthday. It is one of my greatest treasures. Mr. Salter told me you knew our dear boy; and any friend of his is doubly welcome here."

Rachel turned her face towards the speaker, and seeing the kind, gentle look that met hers—so like, and yet so unlike, that of the idol of her soul—burst into a flood of hysterical tears.

"What must you think of me?" she cried, half with shame, half with misery; "but I longed so much to see you, and to weep with you, for you are his mother, are you not?"

"Geoffrey's mother, my dear? Certainly I am, and very proud to be so," replied the little lady.

"Oh! how you must feel it. What an awful loss he must be to you. And to me—to me——"

She stopped, half choked by her tears, but presently went on,—

"I hoped there might be some mistake, that we had been misinformed, till I saw the blinds of the house drawn down, and then I knew—I knew——"

The mother and daughter glanced at each other significantly.

"I don't quite understand you, my dear," said Mrs. Salter, presently. "The blinds are drawn down in the upper part of the house because the rooms are empty. We are going to leave Broadgate Street. My husband has sold the business, and is going to take us into the country. How did that affect you?"

"But Geoffrey—your son?" gasped Rachel. "Haven't you read in the papers?"

"The report of his death in Algiers?" said his mother, calmly. "Oh, yes; and it was most fortunate that we had received letters from him of the same date, detailing the true facts of the case, or we might have been terribly upset. I see, my dear Mrs. Wood (for I believe that is your name)——"

"Wcod—Wood?" said Rachel, in a puzzled manner.

"Mr. Salter understood you to say, the first time you called upon him, that your name was Wood; but perhaps he is mistaken."

"Oh, no; he is right; it is Wood," replied Rachel, with confusion, that Mrs. Salter was not slow to observe. "But about him—your son?"

"I was going to say, that I see you have read the press reports, and believed them. But I am thankful to tell you they are incorrect. Our Geoffrey is alive and well—quite recovered, in fact, from a nasty attack of fever he contracted in Florence. It is the poor gentleman who was travelling with him that died; and, as Geoffrey had to give notice of his death to the authorities, and is not a good French scholar, I conclude the two names got mixed up together, and that is how the mistake occurred."

"Mother! Mother!" exclaimed Emmeline, "the talking is too much for her. She has fainted again."

This time Mrs. Salter sent at once for Dr. Barcham, who pronounced the patient to be exceedingly weak, and quite unfit to be out of bed.

"A friend of yours, of course, Mrs. Salter. Well, put her to bed at once, madam, and don't let her get out again until I give her leave. I'll look in to-morrow morning."

And so Rachel was half led, half carried to an upper story, and installed in a bedroom as well furnished as her own. She resisted at first. She felt herself to be there on false pretences, and that she had no right to accept the hospitality of Geoffrey's people under an assumed name. But Mrs. Salter and Emmeline were most arbitrary, and it was very sweet to be cared for by his mother, and Rachel was scarcely cognizant of more than the one great truth, that Geoffrey lived, and her life was not yet over. She was also exceedingly weak, and thankful to lie down amongst the snowy pillows, and sleep.

"You are *sure*," she said, with an earnest, pathetic look, as Mrs. Salter held a cup of strong beef-tea to her lips, "you are not deceiving me. You are *quite* sure he is alive?"

"I am sure he was alive after the report of his death reached England, my dear," was the reply; "and for the rest, you know, we must trust him with God."

"Yes, yes," murmured Rachel, with a faint smile, as she closed her eyes in sleep.

"My dear," said Mrs. Salter to her husband, when he looked into the sitting-room to ask after the patient, "I am sure there is some mystery about this young lady. I don't believe her name is Wood, and I sincerely hope she is not married, for she appears to be most wonderfully interested in our Geoffrey."

"Well! is there anything mysterious in that? Isn't all the world interested in the boy? When he was reported to be dead, didn't every newspaper in London speak of his death as an universal loss both to art and society?"

"Yes; but all the world didn't tumble down as if it were dead itself, because the blinds of our house were drawn down."

"Hullo! Why, what's that?"

"This young lady, who appears to be a very sweet creature to me, nevertheless confessed as much just now—that her illness was due to the shock of believing Geoffrey to be dead, and that she had not realized the truth until she saw the blinds were drawn."

"Well, and what of it? She is evidently weak and ill,

and I suppose any shock would have made her faint. When she is better, ask her if she didn't come after that place for her friend again. I may be able to help her now. Mr. Milsom intends to keep female servants."

"Geoffrey will be surprised when he hears how suddenly you have made up your mind," said Mrs. Salter. "I expect your news will bring him home sooner than anything else would do."

"The luck was sudden, my dear, so the alteration of plans needed to be so too. If I had not taken Milsom's very handsome offer, I might never have had such another. And Geoffrey, was always urging me to the step. However, this is February, and he would have returned to England next month, I conclude, at the latest. He will have no large picture in the Academy this season, he says, but several sketches."

"I wish Miss Rachel Saltoun, the heiress he was staying with at Roehampton, would engage him to paint her portrait. She is so well known in society that it would bring him into public notice as soon as anything."

"Pshaw!" ejaculated Mr. Salter; "our boy does not need any more pushing. He's quite able to take care of himself. You'll be so proud of him soon, little mother, that we shall have to get you a pair of stilts."

"I can hardly be prouder of him than I am," rejoined Mrs. Salter, as she went to look after her invalid.

Rachel slept on till the evening, and when she woke she was quite alone. The fire burned brightly in the grate, and cast a flickering reflection on the damask hangings of the bed, the white lace and muslin draperies of the windows and toilet-table, and the fine old Derbyshire china on the washing-stand. This was a very different waking from her last. For one moment only she felt uncertain of her destination, and then the happy truth dawned upon her mind, and she remembered that her friend and her lover was alive and well—that she should meet him again, and be able to dispel the misunderstanding between them like a summer cloud, and to tell him to do with her just as he chose to do. She had no doubts nor apprehensions left, no conditions to make, no impossible barriers to try and creep over. She

would place herself like wax in Geoffrey's hands, to be moulded as he willed. She would live in Broadgate Street, if he required it of her. She would serve behind the counter, if she could have him for her lover and her husband no other way. All her pride was beaten out of her at last, or rather her false pride in things over which she had had no control, was merged in her reverence for a mind and character so far above her own. Admiration and esteem had taught her humility, and she was ready to acknowledge that true love, like true religion, demands the sacrifice of all lesser things. She kept on thinking of Geoffrey's words to her at Nice—"The woman whom I love must meet me on my own ground; my people must be her people, as my God is her God. If you come, it must be *all* the way, straight to the heart which has never turned, and never *will* turn, against those to whom it owes it deepest debt of gratitude."

Rachel repeated the sentences over and over to herself, until they resolved into a species of song.

"Yes, my noble, single-hearted Geoffrey," she murmured as she lay in the semi-darkness, "I will come all the way—every bit of it—till I reach the haven where I would be."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"MY BOY."

As she lay there, silent and motionless, two figures softly entered the room. They were Mrs. Salter and Emmeline.

The mother approached the bed to ascertain if their patient was sleeping, but as Rachel did not speak, she took up her position in an arm-chair by the fire, whilst her daughter sat down on a footstool at her feet.

"Shall I light a candle, mother."

"No, dearest, it might arouse Mrs. Wood, and the best thing in the world for her is sleep. Besides, I prefer the firelight. My head aches a little."

"Darling mother! I wish this had not come on you just now, and with Nelly away from home. You are over tired, I am sure. All this excitement will make you ill."

"No, Emmie. Joy never kills. But you say truly, we had enough to think of without this fresh surprise. But I was sure he would come. I told your father so."

"The thing that has astonished me most, mother, is about our name. Does it not seem strange to change it, after so many years? It looks as if we were stealing that of somebody else. Geoffrey will be the most surprised of all."

"Yes; it will make the dear boy open his eyes. But, Emmie, it is chiefly for Geoffrey's sake that father has made up his mind on the subject. Of course, it is his name by law, as much as Miss Saltoun's is hers; and he would have resumed it as soon as he knew the truth, excepting for the fact of our being in trade. But now that we are giving it up, he thinks it may be useful to Geoffrey in making his way in the world. He will be in nowise different from Geoffrey Salter, but society will be snobbish enough to think so."

"But won't it be a lot of trouble to prove our claim to it, mother?"

"I believe not. I suppose there will be some business with the Herald's Office, and perhaps something to pay, because it is more than two centuries since our branch of the family dropped it. But your father has all the proofs, and he says he will only have to advertise in the papers that he has resumed his rightful name."

"How funny! And I shall be Miss——"

"Hush, dear," interposed the mother. "Don't talk so freely. Your father does not wish the matter spoken of until it is all settled."

"Ah, well," said the girl, "I shall be glad when the packing is over, and we find ourselves in Devonshire. The sweet country air will do you good, dear little mother, and the rest and quiet still more. And it is Geoffrey's favorite county for sketching, you know; so you will often have your boy down to see you from London."

"My good, sweet boy!" responded the mother, with trembling lips. "It is to him alone that we owe this great pleasure."

"As almost every pleasure we have had in our lives," acquiesced Emmeline.

At this juncture Rachel stirred. She felt she ought not to lie still and listen to their private conversation any longer.

As the rustle of the bed-clothes reached their ears, Mrs. Salter rose, and again approached the bed.

"You are awake, my dear," she said, kindly.

"Half-awake and half-asleep," murmured Rachel.

"And ready for some tea, I'm sure. Emmie, dear, go down and order Hindes to send it up, and anything she thinks may tempt Mrs. Wood's appetite. I hope you feel better," she continued, as her daughter left the room, and she sat down by Rachel's side.

"Yes; thank you. Well enough, I think, to go home in a cab."

"Dear me, no. You mustn't dream of such a thing. Dr. Barcham gave me particular orders to keep you in bed till he saw you again in the morning. And it is a

raw, damp evening. Not fit for anybody to be out. But if you think your friends will be uneasy about you, I will send them a telegram to say you are here."

Rachel did not know what to answer. At one time, she had resolved to tell Geoffrey's people all the truth about herself, and her great love for him. But that was when she thought that he was dead. Now that she knew him to be living, a natural shyness had come over her again. She did not remember how much, or how little of her feelings, she had betrayed during her state of bewilderment. And to tell her name would be to tell everything.

Mrs. Salter, on the other hand, was anxious to find out exactly who the young stranger was. Her womanly instinct had discovered that Rachel felt more than a friendly interest in her boy. And Mrs. Salter was devoted to Geoffrey, and guarded his reputation with jealous care. If this handsome and aristocratic-looking young lady were a married woman, why, the less she saw of Geoffrey the better, and the sooner she went back to her husband the safer would Mrs. Salter feel her boy to be.

"Did your friends know you were coming to us, my dear?" was her next inquiry.

"I have no friends," replied Rachel, in a low voice.

"*No friends?*" ejaculated Mrs. Salter. "Do you live alone, then?"

"Yes; quite alone."

"How strange. You are very young to be unprotected. Mr. Salter quite thought you were a married woman."

"Oh, no; it was a mistake. I have never been married; I am only a girl. I was twenty-three last birthday, and there is no one to care what may become of me."

Rachel knew this to be untrue. Her heart was really touched at thinking of poor Miss Montrie crying her eyes out at Catherstone, to say nothing of the bewilderment of her relations.

But what could she do? She was unable to rise from her bed, and go to the telegraph-office; and she could not disclose her name. No, not yet. Suppose there was never anything more between Geoffrey and herself. What would the Salters think? What would they say? It

would be remembered against her to her dying day. And so, she was silent.

"That is a very sad thing to say, my dear," replied Geoffrey's mother; "but there will be no one to interfere, at all events, with our keeping you here till you are quite recovered. And now, where did you first meet my boy? I am sure you will tell me that."

"I saw him first in his studio. I went with some friends," said Rachel, timidly.

"And since?"

"Oh, at different places. At parties, at friends' houses, and so on."

"But he goes so little into society. I thought that you might have stayed together, perhaps, at some of the big houses he sometimes goes to."

"Oh, yes, I have. I met him at Catherstone."

"At the Honorable Miss Saltoun's? She is quite a patroness of Geoffrey's. She bought his Academy picture last year, and engaged him to paint the walls of her drawing-room. I believe they are very beautiful. What is Miss Saltoun like, my dear? I have often questioned Geoffrey about her, but could never get much out of him. He is a queer boy sometimes, and won't open his mouth. But I fancy (this is a secret between you and me, remember) that he admires her a great deal, just because he says so little. But of course she would never think of him. She is a very great lady—the granddaughter of the Duke of Craig-Morris—though, if she knew all, she might find—but that's another secret. Is she very handsome, my dear?"

"Oh, no! not at all."

"Not handsome? I am surprised. Very clever, perhaps? She used to paint with Geoffrey."

"Yes; but he didn't think much of her painting. I fancy he taught her more from good-nature than anything else. He was painting her panels, you know."

"Ah, yes! Business, I suppose. Everything must yield to business, and my boy has inherited that capacity from his father. But here is your tea. Now, I shall be quite disappointed if you don't make a good one."

Rachel felt inclined to make a very good one. All that remained of her illness was a kind of languid anxiety for this supreme crisis of her life, to be settled forever.

"Why," she asked, as she sat up in bed, and ate what was placed before her, "do you always speak of Mr. Geoffrey Salter as 'my boy?' Have you not other sons, Mrs. Salter?"

"Yes, my dear; I have four. William, my eldest, is at sea in the merchant service, and Henry is working his own farm out in Manitoba; and John (my baby Jack, as I still call him) has helped his father hitherto in the business. We have not always been as we are now, Miss Wood. There were times, when my boy first began to make money, when Mr. Salter found it very hard to keep his head above water. Bad seasons will do that, you know, my dear, without a man being in fault. The business would have gone more than once if Geoffrey had not come to the rescue. Again and again has he saved us from bankruptcy, and he has lived upon next to nothing, almost starved himself, in fact, and worked hard all the time, in order to keep a roof above our heads."

"Oh, he loves you all dearly. I know it. He has told me so," cried Rachel, with sparkling eyes.

"He has proved his love," said his mother, proudly. "Only last year my husband was in great anxiety about his business. A fraudulent creditor almost beggared us. But my boy came to the front, as usual, notwithstanding all his father's remonstrances, and placed such a sum of money to our credit, that we managed not only to tide over the difficulty, but to enter into a profitable speculation that succeeded beyond all our expectations. And now fortune has come upon us with a rush—a moderate fortune, that is to say, my dear—though I dare say that the Honorable Miss Saltoun, who, I hear, has about fifteen thousand a year, would laugh at my pretension in calling it by such a name. However, an old investment, which Mr. Salter considered a lost game, has brought us in a sum of money sufficient to live quietly in the country upon. And so we have sold the business,

and are about to retire. And it is all due to my boy—my generous, unselfish, loving Geoffrey,” concluded the mother, as she wiped her eyes.

“How you must love him,” said Rachel.

“*Love* him, my dear! Ah! you’ll never know the tenth part of how I love him, of how we all love him, until you have a son of your own as good as he is. My boy was good from a baby. He was always thoughtful and unselfish and true. He is the soul of honor. He would not tell a lie to save his life. The woman who gets him will be a happy woman. Sometimes I think there is no girl good enough for him. And if he were to marry and be unhappy——”

“What then?” asked Rachel.

“I believe he would put an end to himself. I don’t think he could stand it. His nerves are too highly strung. And Geoffrey could not love by halves. He has the most faithful disposition. Where he gives his heart, it will be forever. Pray Heaven he may never be disappointed!”

“Pray Heaven he may not!” echoed her companion, in a whisper.

When Geoffrey Salter walked out of the garden at the Villa Fortaine, at Nice, he was sorely wounded; but he was not angry, unless it were with himself.

He never dreamt of blaming Rachel Saltoun for drawing him once more within the net, only to cast him back as not worthy of capture.

But though this second disappointment was almost unbearable, he gave no vent to it in words, and would not blame Rachel, even in his thoughts.

“I should have followed my own impulses,” he said to himself; “I knew that no good could come of my meeting her. Had I been wise, I should have avoided tearing open the old wound. And yet, how hard—how *very* hard—it is to be wise, with such a temptation before one!”

The young man was in his hotel chamber by this time, and as he thought thus he turned and buried his face in the sofa-cushions.

"No, my darling," he said, quite low to himself, "my peerless, lovely Rachel! Since you cannot be my wife, I will have no wife, but go down to my grave faithful to your sweet memory."

He had quite determined on one thing—that he would not remain in Nice. He had come out of the battle scatheless so far, but Rachel Saltoun held such a strange fascination for him, that he felt he dared not trust himself in her presence.

And he would have died sooner than do anything which should seem to cast a slur upon his parents, or his family. He made up his mind that night to join Captain Trentham at Monaco, for, however short the distance, it would, at least, prevent his encountering Miss Saltoun in her daily walks. When, on the following day, that kind little letter came from Rachel, begging him to return, it was a terrible wrench to Geoffrey to have to answer it as he did.

"But what is the good," he said, to himself, "of entering on so useless a discussion a second time? She will not alter her opinion; I shall not alter mine. I would not enter any family, not even a royal one, on sufferance, neither would I marry a woman unless she considered my people in all respects, except a social one, as good as her own."

But when he had written and despatched the answer, which drove Rachel nearly wild, his physical strength gave way, and Geoffrey felt very ill indeed.

Captain Trentham was quite alarmed at his condition, and carried him over to Algiers, sooner than had been at first intended. Here Geoffrey Salter soon recuperated. Deep and ardent as were his feelings, he was not the love-sick man to brood over and nurse them, until they were beyond his control. He would never forget, nor cease to love, Rachel Saltoun, but it would be a grief locked up in his own breast to his dying day.

So he mixed with his fellow-men, and applied himself assiduously to work, and wrote constantly and cheerfully to his mother. And then after a while—as has been

related—the catastrophe happened, which caused a false report to travel to England.

Fortunately for his own people, Geoffrey had written to his mother by the same mail, telling her of his poor friend's death, and expressing his intention of returning home. The news of his father's proposed retirement from business quickened his proceedings. It was what Geoffrey had always longed for and advocated, not from any false shame about the matter, but because neither his father nor mother were young, and it grieved him to think of their toiling in trade until they dropped into the grave. He wanted to see them happily settled and enjoying themselves in the country, and as soon as he heard of Mr. Milsom's offer, and Mr. Salter's decision to accept it, he packed his traps, and started for England.

He wished to have a finger in that pie. He meant to buy a country house, and if his parents would not accept it from his hands, to lease it to them at a nominal rent. He wanted to take the fatigue and worry of removal off their hands too. He wanted, in fact, to play the *rôle* which he had ever played successfully, of the most loving and dutiful son in England.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“MISS WOOD.”

WHILST Mrs. Salter was sitting by Rachel's bedside, and talking of her boy, the clock struck nine, and she rose, somewhat nervously, from her seat.

“I must leave you now, my dear,”

Mrs. Hindes, who was a portly, respectable-looking woman, who had nursed all the young Salters in her arms, now came forward and lighted the wax candles on the toilet-table, and stirred the fire into a ruddy blaze.

“Do not leave Miss Wood on any account, until she goes to sleep, Hindes,” said her mistress, “and make her eat her little supper.”

“I will be good and do anything you tell me,” interposed Rachel, “only, dear Mrs. Salter, kiss me before you go.”

“Kiss you, dear child? Why, of course I will, replied Geoffrey's mother, as she folded the grand-daughter of the Duke of Craig-Morris in a warm embrace.

“You have been so good to me,” whispered Rachel, as she clung to her.

“Good? Not at all, my dear. Would you have had us turn you out of doors in your weak condition, and a friend of Geoffrey's too? No, no! We are not quite so barbarous as all that.”

“If you please, ma'am,” said Mrs. Hindes, significantly, “I fancy you may be wanted downstairs by this time.”

“Yes, yes, Hindes, I am going,” replied Mrs. Salter, in a fluttering voice; and then she wished Rachel good-night once more, and left the chamber.

And the girl lay on her pillows in a kind of happy dream, with the touch of the lips of Geoffrey's mother still upon her face.

Meantime, Mrs Salter descended the staircase and entered the dining-room, which was brilliantly illuminated. The table was spread with a substantial supper, and the decanters of wine shone like jewels in the gaslight. She glanced round the apartment as she entered.

Mr. Salter was standing before the fire, with his hands under his coat-tails; Master Jack was lounging on the sofa; and Emmie was poring over a book. But there was no one else there.

"Not come yet?" ejaculated Mrs. Salter.

"No; not come yet, little mother," replied her husband; "but he can't be far off now. Why, what a color you have," he continued, as he turned up her face in the gaslight, "one would think you were expecting a lover instead of a son. I don't believe you ever hung out such flattering signals in my honor."

"Oh, Will, don't tease so," she answered. "You forget I haven't seen my boy for six months now. It makes me so nervous, I don't know what to do. Suppose something should detain him after all."

"Suppose those are the wheels of his hansom stopping at the door at this moment," laughed her husband, as a thundering knock resounded on the portals. "Now, little mother, don't jump out of your skin. Give the boy time to cross the hall."

Jack and Emmie had both started up and run out to meet their brother, but Geoffrey gave them a very curt greeting.

"Where's mother?" he exclaimed, as Emmie kissed him; and the next moment he was in the dining-room.

"My boy!" cried Mrs. Salter, ecstatically.

"Mother!" he responded; and, coming forward, he took the little woman in his arms, and kissed her tenderly.

There was no doubt of the strong link of love that bound these two together. Mrs. Salter sobbed from sheer excess of joy, and Geoffrey could not trust himself to speak for a ball that rose in his throat and prevented him.

"My dearest mother," he said, at last, as he held his hand out to grasp that of his father over her shoulder,

"you mustn't cry like this, or I shall go back to Algiers; and when I'm as hungry as a hunter, too. Do you know I've had nothing to eat since three o'clock?"

At this appeal Mrs. Salter looked up, smiling through her tears; and kissing him again, let him go.

"How brown you are, my darling," she exclaimed.

"And how thin," said his father, as Geoffrey threw his thick wraps on one side.

"Oh, he *is* thin," echoed the mother. "Why, my boy, what have you done to yourself? Have you been fretting?"

"Fretting?" cried Geoffrey, quickly. "Why should you think so? But I haven't had a pleasant time of it, as you may suppose. Poor Trentham's death was a great shock to me. I had no idea he was dying till about an hour beforehand. And fancy the papers saying it was I."

"Yes. We have a deal to tell you about that, by-and-by, Geoffrey," said Mrs. Salter, smiling. "It has caused any amount of confusion. But come now, dear boy, and have your supper."

"How good it is to be at home once more," said Geoffrey, as his mother and sister waited on him, and plied his plate with delicacies; "only I miss my little Nelly. Where is she?"

"Staying with the Parkers, at Isleworth, Geoffrey," replied Emmie.

"She should be at home now," said her brother, wrinkling his brows; "everybody should be at home at this crisis, to take all the trouble of packing off mother's hands. When do you move, father? Is anything decided?"

"Everything is settled regarding the business, Geoffrey. Milsom is actually in possession, but we retain the private premises till the end of the month. The question is where to go. We all vote for Devonshire. But a suitable house is not to be found in a hurry; and so many things have to be taken into consideration."

"Certainly! Don't settle yet, whatever you do. Take time about it. Why don't you take mother to the Isle of Wight till the cold weather is over, and leave her and the girls there whilst you and I search for a house?"

"A capital plan, if you can spare the time, Geoffrey."

"Of course I can spare the time. I've done my work for this season. I shall have no big picture in the Academy this year," said Geoffrey, with a sigh; "that must wait till next. Meantime, I am at your service."

"How is it you have been so idle, my boy?" asked Mrs. Salter. "I thought you sketched your design for the next Academy picture last summer."

"So I did, mother; but afterwards, somehow, I didn't feel inclined to work it out. I couldn't satisfy myself. I was out of sorts."

"Poor darling! Perhaps that horrid fever was coming on you," remarked Mrs. Salter.

"Perhaps," replied Geoffrey, with a short laugh; "anyway, I didn't feel equal to tackling so big a subject. It requires a lot of concentration to go steadily at a canvas twelve feet by six, you know!"

"And you required the rest and change to restore your strength, too."

"Oh, there hasn't been much *rest* about it, I can assure you. I have been working hard all the same, and shall have two pictures in the Academy this year, I hope, though less pretentious ones. One is an awfully pretty sketch of a Moorish girl in the market. If I can only carry it out as I saw her, it will do."

"I expect you've been having no end of time amongst those Moorish girls," remarked Jack.

"Only your idea of 'no end of time,' Jack, and mine may possibly differ," said Geoffrey.

"You were never up to much, Geoffrey, except paint and canvases, and books."

"Thank goodness for it. I wish we could say as much for you, master Jack," said their father.

"How I wish I could have been with you in Algiers!" exclaimed Emmeline. "It must be all so new and strange and picturesque."

"Yes, the Algerian part of it, Emmie; but the town is more French than anything else, and you know my old dislike for everything French."

"Including the language," said his sister, slyly.

"Oh, that unfortunate mistake. Yes, it was all through my beautiful French. What between my agitation and distress over poor Trentham's death and my blunders, I managed to make a pretty hash of it."

"And to drive some of your admirers half frantic with the idea that they were never going to see you again," retorted Emmie.

Geoffrey colored.

"I did not know that anyone had sufficient interest in me (except yourselves) to care anything about me."

"Ah, that's what *you* say——"

"Now, Emmie," interposed her mother, "please let me tell Geoffrey about it. Who do you think we have upstairs, my boy?"

"*Upstairs!*" he echoed.

"Yes, in the guest chamber. She's not well, or doubtless she would be here. A friend of yours."

"I think we may say, a *great* friend, mother," added Emmeline.

"I am quite in the dark," said Geoffrey. "I have no lady friends."

"*Miss Wood.*"

"Miss Wood," repeated Geoffrey. "I don't know any one of the name."

"Oh, you *must*. Just think a little. She says you often met in society, and she stayed with you at the Honorable Miss Saltoun's, at Catherstone."

At the mention of that name, Geoffrey's face changed visibly, but he tossed off the glass of wine that stood at his elbow before he replied.

"I am sure that must be an error. No one was staying at Catherstone whilst I was employed there, except Miss Saltoun's companion, Mrs. Cranley."

"But this lady must have met you there, for she particularly mentioned it."

"She may have been at one of Miss Saltoun's at-homes, but I do not remember being introduced to her. I have not an acquaintance of the name Wood. She must have mistaken me for some one else."

"Oh, no, no, no; that is impossible," exclaimed Mrs.

Salter. "She knows you quite well, and all about you. She was very much upset by the report of your death."

"She does me great honor," said Geoffrey. "But, mother, how does she come to be staying in our house?"

"Well, my boy, it is quite a long story, but it happened in this wise. Some time ago—it was in September, wasn't it, William?"

"Yes, or thereabouts," replied Mr. Salter.

"In September last, we'll say, this lady called to see your father about a situation as server for a friend of hers, and she mentioned, in the course of conversation, that she knew you. Father would have done anything in his power for her after that, but he never employed female servers, as you know, and so he told her."

"And she said her name was Wood?"

"Yes. We thought she said Mrs. Wood at first, but now she says she is Miss Wood."

"And have you kept her since last September?" inquired Geoffrey.

"My dear boy, what nonsense! Of course not. But this morning a lady fainted in the shop, and your father carried her in here, and laid her on the sofa. And then he found it was Miss Wood again. She seemed very weak and ill, and I sent for Dr. Barcham, and he insisted upon her being put to bed at once, and she has remained there ever since."

"How very awkward for you, mother, having a perfect stranger in the house, and just at this time, too."

"Not at all, Geoffrey. I dare say she will be well enough to move to-morrow. She would have gone to-day if I had let her. But she is very weak still, and not fit to travel. The funny part is, you not remembering her name."

"What is she like?" demanded Geoffrey.

"Tall and slight, with a quantity of hair and beautiful eyes. Evidently a lady, and, I should say one of high birth."

Geoffrey's thoughts flew immediately to Kate Cranley. It was the sort of thing she would be likely to do—to follow him to his parents' home, and make a scene there.

"But how did my name crop up?" he asked.

"My dear, it was the first word she uttered on regaining consciousness. She said—but, perhaps, it would not be fair to tell you all she said, for she was in a very bewildered condition, only she let me understand plainly that she had come here with the idea of ascertaining if the report of your death was true, and that when she saw the upper blinds drawn down she considered it a confirmation of the fact, and it had such an effect upon her that she fainted."

"Highly complimentary, I am sure," said Geoffrey, grimly.

"Don't laugh about it, my boy, for the poor girl seems to have suffered very much. But she is very reticent about herself. I can't find out where she lives, or who are her friends. I offered to telegraph to them for her, in case they should be frightened at her absence; but she declares that she has no friends, and no one to care what becomes of her."

"An admirable device to retain possession of the spare bed," laughed Geoffrey. "Dear little mother! taken in for the hundredth time. When will she learn wisdom, father?"

"Never, I hope, if it is to include suspicion and want of kindness. She couldn't have done less, in this instance, than she has done, Geoffrey. The young lady was evidently ill. It would have been inhuman not to give her a resting-place."

"You are both too good," replied Geoffrey, as he rose from table and stretched himself. "I suppose I can have a bed here for to-night, mother? I feel a little knocked up with my journey."

"Of course, dear. It is always ready for you. Jack, go upstairs with your brother. No, don't say good-night to me, Geoffrey. I shall come and tuck-up my boy as usual before I go to bed myself."

CHAPTER XXXV.

AGAIN.

It was about half-an-hour afterwards that Mrs. Salter tapped at the door of Geoffrey's room, and entering, took a seat by his bedside. Her son had been keeping awake in anticipation of her coming, for he wanted to say a few words to her alone. What little he had heard of the mysterious visitor seemed to fix her identity on that of Mrs. Cranley, whom he could believe capable of any subterfuge in order to gain her own ends. But what could her end be in coming to Broadgate Street? He could never believe she had been really fond of him. Did she imagine his people were rich, and hoped to get anything by the pretended affection out of them? At any rate, he did not wish to encounter her. He despised her too much for all she had done and said at Catherstone; and he felt he might take his mother, from whom he had been accustomed to conceal nothing (except the one great trouble of his life), so far into his confidence, as to ask to prevent a meeting between them.

"How good it is to have you at home again," said Mrs. Salter, as she took her boy's hand in hers. "I cannot be happy whilst there is such a distance between us; it frightens me."

"It shall not occur again, mother, if you do not wish it," replied Geoffrey; "but I wish you would tell me more about this lady who calls herself Miss Wood. There is only one person I can think of, who at all answers to your description of her, and if it be she, I must tell you honestly I don't want to meet her again. Also, that I think her fainting, and all that nonsense, must have been put on for effect for she is not a person of any deep feeling."

"Oh, no, Geoffrey! we must do her justice. Dr.

Barcham is a witness that there was no affectation in the matter. The poor girl swooned more than once. And if she proves to be the lady you imagine, I shall be sorry, for she seems such a sweet, sorrowful young creature to me, though she has been very different since I told her you were alive and well."

"But it is nonsense," said Geoffrey, impatiently. "I have given no woman the right to feel like that about me. I'm not the sort of man to go making love all round. It places me in a false position, and makes me look ridiculous."

"And would it be impossible, then, for a girl to love you, without your returning her affection, Geoffrey?"

"I think so, because I have never given one the opportunity. But if your guest is the lady I suspect her to be, she is not young. She must be five-and-thirty."

"Then it cannot be the same. Miss Wood is quite a girl, with a very white smooth skin, and beautiful hands, and an abundance of chestnut hair."

Geoffrey sat straight up in bed.

"*Chestnut hair!* You said dark hair, at supper time."

"No, dear! I never mentioned the color; but Miss Wood's is decidedly chestnut, like our Nelly's. And her eyes are a kind of grayish blue. And she cannot be poor, Geoffrey, for she was dressed magnificently. Her sables must be worth a small fortune."

Geoffrey Salter threw himself back upon the pillow.

"A thousand women in London!" he exclaimed, "have chestnut hair!"

"Oh, certainly, darling! and Miss Wood is nothing out of the common way. Some people might call her pretty, but it is a very sad face. But whatever you may affirm about not knowing her, I am sure she knows you, and appreciates you; and that is quite enough for your mother, Geoffrey."

"Yes, dear mother! You are quite foolish enough for anything. This lady cannot, at all events, be the one I mean. But I don't wish to see her, and therefore I think you had better let her depart in peace, without saying a word of my return. I shall go early to-morrow to the

studio, to give my housekeeper a few orders, and be back to dinner. I suppose your visitor will be gone by that time."

"I daresay she will, Geoffrey, if Dr. Barcham gives his permission. Poor child! I will go now and see how she is getting on. I feel quite drawn towards her. To be so young and unprotected."

Geoffrey Salter lay awake for some time after his mother had left him, speculating rather curiously on the identity of this fair unknown, who appreciated him well enough to faint on his behalf. But he was handsome and young, and a genius, and had passed through several such little episodes during his artistic career, so it did not occupy his thoughts very long.

Women were all of them imaginative and hysterical creatures, and would raise an ideal from a scarecrow, if they could find nothing better to idolize. His mother's guest was probably some schoolgirl, who had found no better object than himself on which to vent her overplus of sentiment. He trusted she would clear out promptly, and leave him at liberty to visit his old home. And then he heaved an ardent sigh for his lost Rachel, and fell to sleep.

Is there not a subtle influence and intuition between people who love each other? Rachel could not rest that night, any more than Geoffrey, but her thoughts flew to Miss Montrie, and what *he* would have wished her to do under the circumstances. It was cruel to have left the loving old soul in suspense all these hours. What would she think had become of her? To whom would she fly in her distress? To the Duke of Craig-Morris, or Sir Henry Mordaunt?

Rachel smiled in the darkness, as she thought what the Duke would say if he knew where she had passed the night, and how he would mouth his censures on the family of the "artist fellow." But she had a weapon ready wherewith to parry the attack of the old gentleman now. She could ask him which was the most estimable of the two—the family which disgraced itself by disreputable *liaisons*, and long-standing debts, or the family which had

lived pure and honorable lives, and behaved honestly towards all men? And so elated did she feel at the prospect of a reconciliation with her lover, that she longed for the moment to come when she would be justified in confessing before her grandfather and the world that she loved him—him, the “artist fellow,” whom God had mercifully given her back from the dead. She could have no doubts now and no scruples. She knew what she had felt when she believed she had lost him. That was the gauge of her true feelings. And she knew that if she ever found him again—found him in the true sense of the word, as her lover and her friend—she would be prepared to place her hand in his, and walk through life with him, exultant and triumphant. But poor Miss Montrie! What could she do to relieve the old woman’s anxiety, without betraying her real name to the Salters?

Rachel did not want to do that, until she was *quite* sure that Geoffrey would forgive her for the second time. She had shown them all so plainly what she felt for him. The stigma of immodesty would follow her through life. So it seemed impossible to send a message to Catherstone, unless she could carry it to the telegraph office herself. She looked at her watch. It was just eight o’clock, and the pale, February light was beginning to steal its way dimly through the carefully-drawn blinds.

Rachel had heard that the post-offices opened at that hour, and thought that if she rose at once, she might creep out of the house and in again, before her absence was discovered.

However, it was easier said than done. The fire had been out some time, and the room felt bitterly cold, and she had never dressed without assistance in her life before. She was still weak from her illness, and her hands trembled as she fastened her various articles of clothing.

But she persevered, though very slowly; and when she had assumed her walking-costume, with the sables which Mrs. Salter so much admired, and put a broad felt hat with ostrich feathers on her head, she began to feel warmer and more courageous.

She opened her bedroom door and peeped furtively out.

Everything seemed quiet. She could hear the servants in the lower part of the house, but she did not mind them, so long as none of the family started up to forbid her project.

But, at all risks and hazards, she said to herself, Miss Montrie must be put out of her suspense.

Taking her purse in one hand, Rachel found her gloves were missing. She had no idea where she had left them; but her kind hostess had probably drawn them off when she was taken ill, and deposited them in the dining-room.

Rachel fancied she should remember the room again. It was the first door on the right as you entered the hall.

She closed her own door softly and crept downstairs. The dining-room door stood open, and a fire, evidently just lighted, was burning and crackling in the grate.

She entered it and gazed around. The first glance showed her she was not alone. Breakfast was laid at one end of the table, and a man, with his back towards her, was busily engaged at the very sofa on which she had been laid the day before, strapping a travelling plaid round a portfolio.

Rachel gave a faint exclamation of surprise, and he turned and saw her, standing on the threshold, clad in her velvets and sables, and with the ostrich plumes shadowing her bright hair. It was Geoffrey Salter.

For a moment, neither spoke. Then Rachel gasped: "*Home*. You are home again. My God!"

And he replied by casting his portfolio to one side and rushing up to her.

"Rachel—Miss Saltoun! What are you doing *here*?"

He had forgotten all about the girl who occupied his mother's guest chamber. He never connected the presence of Rachel with *her*. His complete amazement at her unexpected appearance, made his words seem almost brusque. But his earnest face glowed at her all the time.

"What am I doing here?" she faltered. "I—I—haven't they told you? I am staying with your mother. But I never dreamt you were so near. When did you arrive?"

He took no notice of her question.

"Have you been sleeping here?" he asked, quickly.

"Are you the girl that fainted yesterday? Did you think that I was dead? Did you come here for news of me?"

His eyes were so widely opened, his brows so knit, and his speech so hurried, that Rachel thought he was accusing her of doing something that displeased him. She sunk down in the nearest chair, and covered her face with her hands, whilst he bent over her, breathless, for her reply.

"Oh, Geoffrey! don't think hardly of me. I was so miserable. I have been so miserable since we parted at Nice. And then, this terrible report of your death. It—it——"

She could say no more. Shame prevented her confessing *how* she had felt it, before he had spoken further to her.

"Did it worry you so much as all that, Rachel?" he whispered.

"*Worry me.* Is that the term to use for it? It nearly drove me out of my senses."

"My dearest. But what made you come *here*?"

"Oh, I *longed* so," she cried, in a sudden feverish burst of passion, "to come to your *mother*, Geoffrey. To feel the same arms that had folded you, round me. To weep for you, upon her breast. Was I *mad* to come? Yet has she been so good and sweet to me, although she does not know my name."

"She is good and sweet to everybody," replied Geoffrey, "and would have been doubly so, had she known how dear you are to me, Rachel. Thank you, my sweet love, for your sympathy and your affection. But, is this not a needless harrowing of your tender feelings? I am not dead, you see, dear. Perhaps it were better for me if I were. But the fatal barriers still remain, and ever must remain between us."

"Not if you will it otherwise, dear Geoffrey."

"Oh! my queen, how can I take advantage of so sweet a concession on your part, when I know that nothing is altered since the day when I last saw you, and left you under such a bitter sense of disappointment? Your tender

heart has been moved to pity, because you thought me gone forever. But I am alive and well, you see, and I am still a *tradesman's son*, who is yet proud of his father and his mother."

"And I am proud of you and them," replied Rachel, raising her eyes to his. "No, darling, let me speak. You said that day, you know, that I was a princess and you a commoner. Well, I am glad it is so, because that gives the princess the privilege to say what she means. Do you remember the words I spoke at Catherstone—that you asked me to repeat at Nice—'*I love you?*' Let me repeat them now, Geoffrey. I love you, and you have said that you love me. Then let us crown our love by marriage."

He was kneeling beside her chair, and as she spoke the words, he threw his arms about her waist, and strained her tightly to him.

"Rachel, Rachel be careful what you say! I will not let you off your words another time. Can you tell me this from your very heart, and in my father's house? He will be your father, remember, and the world must know it openly."

"Let the world know it," she cried. "I say it, Geoffrey, in your father's house, and now that I have seen him and your dear mother. Let your people be my people, as your God is my God."

She looked down as she concluded, and he looked up, and their eyes met, and their lips, in the kiss of a lasting betrothal.

"Oh! what have I ever said or done," exclaimed Geoffrey, as he nestled his head down in her furs, "that I should have such happiness as this? To hold you as my own. To spend my life beside you. Oh! love, I think our earthly lives must be over, and Heaven has begun!"

"Geoffrey, darling, we shall be *so* happy," she murmured, "and we will do all we can to make our people happy too. Oh! I mean to be so good—so good—with you! You shall scold me as much as ever you like, and I will never be cross or angry. For you have taught me all I know of good, dear, and even if I had married another

man, I should have wanted to come to you for counsel and advice."

"Oh ! that would have never done at all," said Geoffrey, comically, as he looked up from his nest in the furs, and kissed her again. And just at that identical moment the door opened, and Mrs. Salter stood before them.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FOREVER.

RACHEL and Geoffrey were so busy with one another that they never perceived her entrance till the girl looked up, and with a startled exclamation sprang to her feet, crimson with annoyance, leaving Geoffrey stranded on his knees. Mrs. Salter did not quite understand the first aspect of affairs. She had too much faith in her son to believe him guilty of a serious impropriety, and yet it seemed strange, to say the least of it, to catch him in the act of embracing a young lady whom he had declared he did not even know the name of.

But all the remonstrance she uttered was,—

“My boy?”

“Oh! Mrs. Salter,” cried Rachel, “what *must* you think of us?”

“*Think!*” echoed Geoffrey, struggling to his feet. “The question is, What are we to think of *her* for bursting in upon us in this unceremonious fashion, without even tapping at the door? Where are your manners, old lady?” he concluded, kissing her fondly.

“Geoffrey, my dear; if I had only known,” commenced Mrs. Salter. “But I believed Miss Wood to be in her bed, and I was coming down to see after your breakfast. Besides, you told me yesterday you did not know her.”

“Neither do I know Miss Wood, mother. I have never even seen her.”

“Oh, Geoffrey; what am I to believe?” cried his mother; and “Oh, Geoffrey, *do* tell her. This is unkind to *me!*” burst from Rachel.

He turned and took her hand and led her up to Mrs. Salter.

“Kiss her, dear mother, with your very best kiss, for she is going to be your daughter.”

"My daughter? You are engaged to marry my boy? I half suspected this yesterday. Oh, my dear girl. May God's best blessings rest on you and him."

Rachel clung to her, as if she had indeed found a mother.

"Dear Mrs. Salter. You do not quite understand. It was not so yesterday. Geoffrey and I had parted rather sadly at Nice, and I was very unhappy, and then this morning—the surprise—the pleasure of meeting again——"

"I see," said Mrs. Salter, smiling; "it made you read each other's hearts in a truer light. Well, dearest boy, you know how I shall rejoice in your happiness, but I must scold this dear girl for being out of bed, and I really think I ought to take her back to it."

"Oh, no! I am so much better. Let me sit here with Geoffrey," pleaded Rachel. "It is so long since we met."

"I will make you a cup of tea, then," said Mrs. Salter, bustling to the tea-tray; "and, Geoffrey, bring her close to the fire. What is your Christian name, dear? This *will* be a surprise for father."

Rachel glanced at her lover, who was gazing adoringly at her.

"Geoffrey, you have never told her!"

"No; but I will. It will be a greater surprise for you all than you have any idea of, mother. This young lady has been playing a trick upon you. It is no wonder I did not recognize her. Her name is not Wood at all. She is Miss Rachel Saltoun of Catherstone."

"The Honorable Miss Saltoun? The lady who bought your picture!" exclaimed Mrs. Salter, with an expression almost of fear.

Rachel slid from her lover's encircling arm, and threw herself at his mother's feet.

"Oh, don't look at me like that! Don't think of my horrid money, or my family, or of anything, except that I am to be Geoffrey's wife! I love him, dear Mrs. Salter. I have loved him from the first hour we met."

"You love him, really and truly," exclaimed the anxious mother. "But what will your grand relations say to the connection?"

"I shall not ask them. I am my own mistress. Did I not tell you I had no friends who cared for me? But *you* will be my friend and my mother, will you not? My mother, as you are Geoffrey's?"

"My dear young lady——"

"No, no; say Rachel—*dear* Rachel, if you will! But raise no false barrier between us, I implore you, Mrs. Salter, or you will cast me back, so disappointed, on myself!"

"Mother," interposed Geoffrey, "if you knew her heart, her noble, generous, impulsive heart, which is ready to sacrifice all the world for the sake of my unworthy self, you would not be afraid to take her in your arms, and thank her for her love of me."

"I am not afraid," replied Mrs. Salter. "I feel she must be a true woman to have discovered all my boy's merits, and decided them to be worth so great a sacrifice. For it *will* be a sacrifice, my dear girl, say what you may. When a nobly-born heiress like yourself chooses a man who is dependent on his exertions for a living, Society will frown, and say hard things of her."

"Let it frown," said Rachel. "Geoffrey and I hate the ugly thing alike, and shall never trouble it. We shall have each other and our art to live for. Our tastes are sympathetic. We both dislike the world, and would rather live by ourselves, 'far from the madding crowd,' wouldn't we, Geoffrey?"

"A great deal rather, dear. We shall find our world in our painting."

"Yes,—I in watching the culmination of your genius, and you in correcting all my horrible mistakes. Poor Geoffrey!"

"Ray, you are not doing yourself justice. She is a very fair artist, mother, and has so much enthusiasm and perseverance that I should not be surprised to see her pictures in the Academy some day, hanging beside my own."

"Oh!" cried Rachel, at this barefaced piece of flattery, just as the door opened to admit Mr. Salter and Emmeline.

Of course, the whole affair had to be explained over

again, and, whilst Rachel stood blushing before him, Mr. Salter looked more proud than surprised to learn that his handsome and talented son had won the affections of the aristocratic Miss Saltoun.

"And so you are really Miss Rachel Saltoun, of whom we have all talked and thought so much," he said, as he took her two hands in his, and gazed earnestly in her crimson face; "and you have consented to be my boy's wife. Well, do you know, I always thought there was something rather suspicious about that visit of his to Catherstone? It lasted so long, and the work seemed to take such a time to finish."

"Good gracious, sir!" cried Geoffrey; "there were eight panels. No one could have done them justice in less time. I scuttled through them as fast as ever I could."

"Oh, Geoffrey!" interposed Rachel, reproachfully.

"Never mind, my dear (I suppose I may call you 'my dear,' since you are going to become my daughter?)"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Salter; always, I hope."

"You can make him do them all over again now, if he has really scamped his work. But this is an astounding piece of news. What made you take a fancy to such an unknown fellow, when you must have half the sprigs of nobility at your feet?"

"*Unknown?*" exclaimed Rachel, "when all the world talks of him. Oh, no, sir; it is the sprigs of nobility (as you call them) who are unknown. Who cares whether they live or die? But Geoffrey's work will live long after we are both dead. *That* is why I took a fancy to him—if you call it a fancy; but I call it love."

"That's a brave girl. That's the word I like to hear from a woman's lips—straightforward, honest *love*. Geoffrey, my boy, I congratulate you," said Mr. Salter, as he stretched out his hand to his son. "And I congratulate you, too, Miss Saltoun."

"Rachel, if you please, Mr. Salter."

"Rachel, by all means. I congratulate you, too, Rachel, for I know that you have won a heart of gold, who would not love you except for yourself, if you possessed the riches of the Indian Empire."

"Because she is more in herself, father, than an empire. Rachel and I have been some time arriving at this conclusion. There were so many things to hold us back, and make us hesitate. So great a difference between us—that is, in worldly things."

"I am glad you put in that clause, Geoffrey," said Rachel. "And what about the difference in our moral and mental worth? Wasn't that sufficient to make me fear too close a contact? The fact is, Mr. Salter, we have cared too much for each other to be able to make up our minds. The question seemed too momentous. But now that we have——"

"It is once and for always," interposed Geoffrey, "for we know we cannot live without each other."

"Right! right!" said the father; "but how is it, Rachel, that you called yourself Miss Wood, to us?"

Rachel became scarlet.

"Oh, sir, forgive me. Don't speak of it; I am so ashamed. But Geoffrey and I had not come to an understanding then, you know; and I was afraid to give my own name, for fear you should all guess my secret."

"I see. But what about the young friend for whom you wanted an engagement?" said Mr. Salter, slyly.

"I shall not answer any more questions," cried Rachel. "Geoffrey! come to the rescue, and save me from this terrible catechism."

"Give me a kiss then, that I may be sure this is not at all a joke," said Mr. Salter, "and then we will have some breakfast."

The bell was rung to summon the servants, and Emmeline, having embraced Rachel, proceeded to help her to lay aside her walking things.

"But where were you going at this time of the morning?" demanded Mr. Salter.

Rachel gave a violent start, and crimsoned with recollection.

"That reminds me. Oh, Geoffrey! I am a wicked, selfish girl. I have never let Miss Montrie know what has become of me."

"Ray! Ray! That is too bad of you. The poor old

lady will be half out of her senses. Doesn't she know you are with us?"

"How should she? I left Catherstone yesterday without telling a soul. I don't think I quite knew what I was about. She had left me in bed. I had fainted when—when——"

"When what?" demanded Geoffrey, coming to her side, as he perceived her agitation.

"When that man—Lord Vivian—came and told me you were gone, Geoffrey. Oh, what a difference between yesterday and to-day."

She took her lover's hand before them all, and squeezed it hard, as she gazed into his face.

"And who is Miss Montrie, dear?" asked Mrs. Salter.

"My companion, and the poor old thing is so fond of me, she will half break her heart by fancying I am dead, or something. Oh, Emmie! give me back my cloak. I must go and send her a telegram at once. That is why I got up so early. Only—I met Geoffrey, and—and—it all went out of my head."

"Very natural," said Mr. Salter. "But you do not go out without your breakfast, Rachel. Let the servant take your telegram to the office, and when you wish to return to Catherstone, Geoffrey and I will escort you home. You are not to go rattling about town by yourself any more, young lady; not, that is, until Geoffrey is dead and buried again for the second time."

Rachel's eyes gave a soft, appealing glance at her lover, as though the thought were too terrible to dwell on, and then a message was written and despatched, which met Sir Henry Mordaunt and Miss Montrie on their return to Catherstone—a message which relieved their immediate fears for Rachel's personal safety, but which coincided so much with the Baronet's ideas concerning his niece's predilection for Geoffrey Salter, that he considered it his duty to go back to town and inform the Duke of Craig-Morris of his grand-daughter's destination.

"After all," he thought to himself, "he is the girl's nearest relation, and must be made to exert his authority to prevent such mad *escapades* for the future. The idea

of her running off to strangers in this fashion, and without consulting any one in the matter! She will lose her character if she does not take care. Now, Miss Montrie," he continued, "Ray wires, as you see, that she will be home this afternoon, so you need not disturb yourself further, I will return to town to let his Grace and Lady Mordaunt know of her safety, and will be here to meet her when she arrives."

And so Sir Henry journeyed back, much perturbed in spirit, and vexed at having had so much trouble for nothing, and confided his grievances to the Duke of Craig-Morris. The upshot of which was that when Rachel Saltoun, with Geoffrey and Mr. Salter, returned to her own home, she found both her grandfather and her uncle awaiting her. She ran into the library, followed closely by her escorts, blooming and excited. She only expected to meet Miss Montrie, and for the moment she only saw her.

"Dear old Montrie," she exclaimed, as she embraced her, "I owe you ten thousand apologies for keeping you in suspense. But it was not at all my fault, dear. I have been very ill, and—but I will explain all that afterwards. Let me introduce these gentlemen to you—Mr. Salter and his son, Mr. Geoffrey Salter. It was all a mistake about his death. Those wretched newspapers——"

She was running on thus, with her eyes fixed on Miss Montrie's face, when that lady interrupted her.

"Yes, yes, my darling girl! and I am indeed thankful to receive you home again. But you do not seem to see his Grace and Sir Henry Mordaunt. They came here expressly to meet you."

It was an awkward position for all of them. Mr. Salter and Geoffrey standing, hats in hand, in the background, and the two aristocrats glancing at them, as if they had no business to be there.

"Grandfather! Uncle Henry!" exclaimed Rachel, with a sudden quickening of the action of her heart. She felt that the moment of explanation had come sooner than she had anticipated, and she would have liked to have had a little more time to prepare herself for the storm which

was certain to ensue. But she was equal to the occasion. She drew herself up to her full height, like a soldier going to battle, grew a little redder, and breathed a little faster, but was plucky and courageous notwithstanding. After all, they could not take Geoffrey from her. She was of age, and could choose for herself. *That* was the thought which upheld her. "Grandfather! Uncle!" she repeated, "Mr. Salter and his son have brought me home. Let me introduce you to each other."

"I want no introductions," replied the Duke, angrily, striking his stick upon the ground. "What *I* want to know is where you came from, and how you dare leave your home in this disgraceful manner, without apprising your friends of your intention?"

"*Dare!*" repeated Rachel, with inflated nostrils.

"Permit me, your Grace, to answer one of your questions," said Mr. Salter, stepping forward. "Miss Saltoun comes from *my* house, where she has been as carefully guarded as though she had been in a palace."

"And pray, sir," cried the Duke, insolently, "*who* are you, and *what* is your house?"

"It is the home of my affianced husband," exclaimed Rachel, "and the proper place for me to be when I am out of my own. I am engaged to be married to Mr. Geoffrey Salter, grandfather, and I intend to carry out my engagement."

"Ray, Ray!" exclaimed Sir Henry Mordaunt, "what is this fresh mania on your part? What do you know of these people to contemplate so close an alliance with them! Who *is* Mr. Salter?"

"If you mean *me*, Sir Henry," replied Geoffrey's father, "I will also answer that question. I am a tradesman. For more than two centuries my branch of the family have been settled in Broadgate Street, as hosiers, and we have not been ashamed of it. Circumstances now permit me to retire, and I am about to take advantage of the fact——"

"Tradesmen! Oh! Rachel, Rachel!" groaned Sir Henry.

"Hear the fellow talk of his *family!*" sneered the Duke.

"Yes, your Grace, I have as good a right to speak of it as you of yours, and in the same terms, for your family and mine are one. I am a Saltoun!"

"Father!" exclaimed Geoffrey, in his surprise.

"It is the truth, my boy."

"I, the relation of a hosier? D'ye mean to insult me?" yelled the old Duke, as he tottered to his feet.

"Not unless the truth insults your Grace! My great-great-grandfather was Lord Hugh Saltoun, the youngest brother of the first Duke of Craig-Morris, who, being a Cavalier, married the daughter of a Roundhead, and was disinherited by his father in consequence. He had nothing to support his wife and children on, and being disowned by all his family, dropped his title, and adopted his father-in-law's business."

"Of course, of course!" cried Rachel, with sparkling eyes. "Haven't I told you of it, Geoffrey? And I knew Lord Hugh Saltoun had changed his name, though I never heard what he took in exchange."

"He changed his name, and dropped his title, and I never wish to see the last revived. But the name of Saltoun I intend to reassume. I have intended to do so for some time past for my children's sake, and now that this young lady is to be married to my son, I shall have a double motive in proving my claim to it."

"I don't believe a word you say. It is all a fraud, trumped up for the occasion. It is a piece of collusion between my grand-daughter and the husband she has so unwisely chosen. I refuse now and always to recognize your claim to the title, or theirs either."

"Take care it is not *we* who shall refuse to recognize the Duke of Craig-Morris!" exclaimed Rachel, fearlessly. "I don't think there is much *kudos* to be got of the acquaintance, grandfather, after the company I found you in the last time I called at your chambers."

The old man turned a look of positive hatred at her, as he attempted to leave the room.

"Let me go," he said. "I wash my hands of all of them."

Sir Henry tried to dissuade him.

"Would it not be wiser for your Grace to restrain yourself until you know whether this gentleman is really what he claims to be?"

"I don't want to know him, I tell you," replied the old man. "I don't want to know any of them, and that girl above all, not if she were the Queen of Sheba."

And with that, he shambled from the room.

"Ray, my dear child," said Sir Henry, as he lingered for a moment, "I must see him home. He is shaking with rage and indignation. But I will return to-morrow, and hear all you may have to tell me. And you, Mr. Saltoun," he continued, turning to Geoffrey's father, and holding out his hand, "excuse the abruptness of my departure, and accept my congratulations on all that has and may befall you. His Grace will come round when your claim is properly established. He is too proud, after all, of the old name, not to acknowledge and respect it."

And with that he was gone.

"And after all," said Rachel, with a big sigh of relief, "we have each other. Mr. Salter—Geoffrey—would any of us exchange the experience we have passed through for all the smiles of all the dukes in England?"

"I think not," replied Mr. Salter, smiling.

"I am *sure* not," said Geoffrey, with an ardent look of love.

"And now, dear old lady," cried Rachel, spinning Miss Montrie round till she was dizzy, "show these gentlemen to some room where they can make themselves 'beautiful forever,' for we are all going to dine together to-night, like a happy family."

Mr. Salter followed Miss Montrie from the apartment, but Geoffrey stayed, loverlike, behind.

"Love," he whispered, "are you *sure* you don't repent?"

"In dust and ashes," she answered, merrily. "For don't you see what a terrible mistake I have made? I shall not change my name after all; I shall be Rachel Saltoun to the very end. How horribly monotonous?"

